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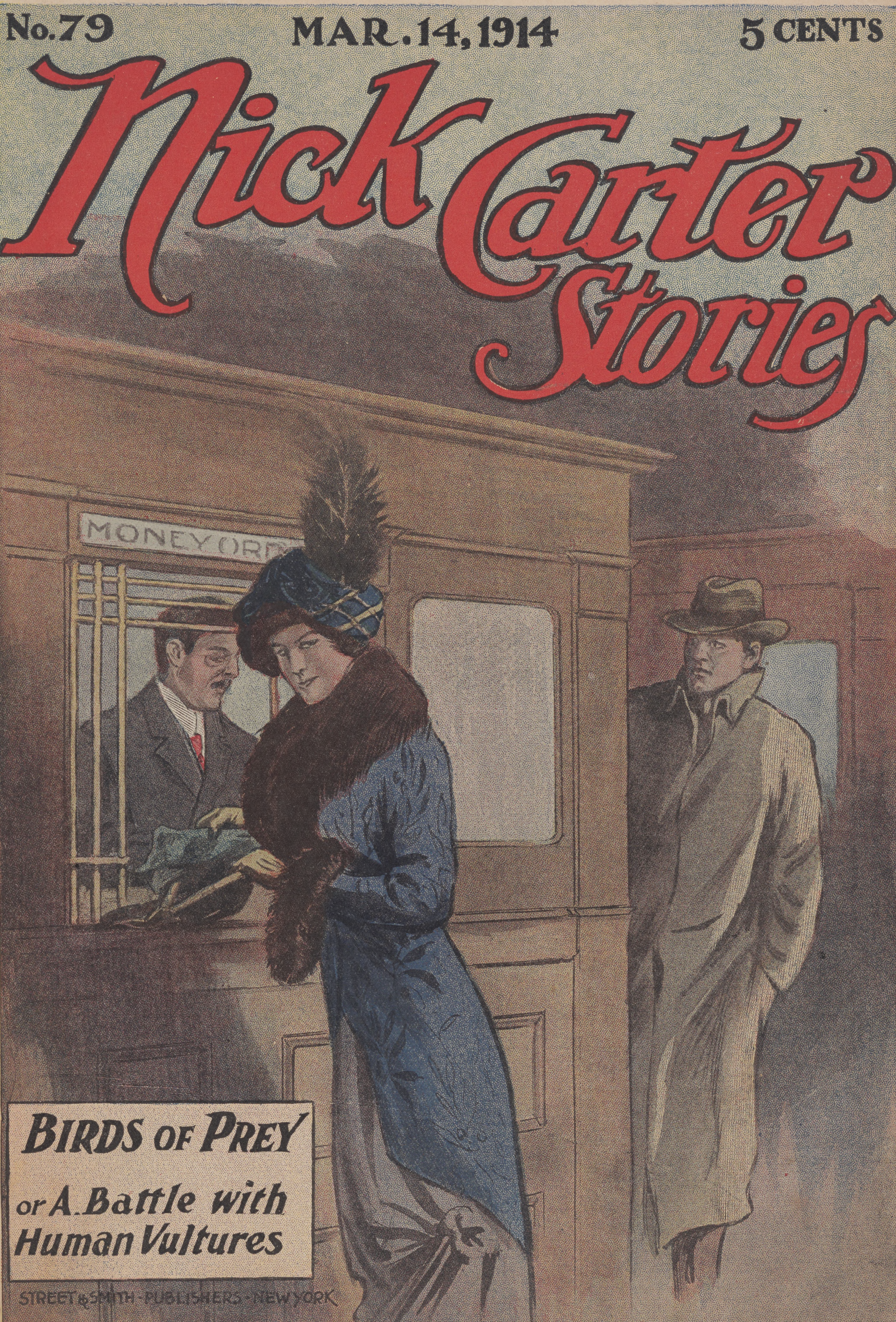
Nick Carter Stories



BIRDS OF PREY

or A Battle with Human Vultures

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NICK CARTER STORIES

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BIRDS OF PREY;

Or, A BATTLE WITH HUMAN VULTURES.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

TELEPHONE TRICKERY.

Nick Carter saw at a glance there was something wrong. He was too keen a physiognomist to misinterpret the expression on the face of the approaching man. He closed his umbrella, and drew back into the doorway from which he was emerging.

It was that of an office building in the city of Fall River, where Nick had been testifying in an embezzlement case against the treasurer of one of the large cotton mills, having personally arrested the defaulter in New York the previous month.

The trial had ended that afternoon. Nick had just left the office of the district attorney to go to the Mellen House for his luggage, and to await the departure of the New York boat early that evening. It then, however, was only four o'clock.

As he was leaving the building mentioned, pausing to raise his umbrella to protect him from the drizzling rain, Nick saw the man in question hastening up North Main Street. He was a portly, well-dressed man of fifty, whose smoothly shaven face wore an expression of mingled perplexity, apprehension, and distrust so pronounced that the detective lingered to watch him.

The stranger hurried across the street and entered the building, bestowing one swift, searching glance upon Nick as he passed him, and then ran quickly up the corridor stairs.

Nick gazed after him, so strongly impelled to follow him that he turned from the street door and mounted several of the stairs, where he briefly hesitated.

"He certainly had something serious on his mind," he said to himself. "Not ordinary business, either, or he would not have looked so sharply at me, nor have been in such haste to——"

Then, while he briefly weighed the matter, Nick heard a cry which not only confirmed his misgivings, but also sent him at top speed up the remaining stairs and into the corridor on the second floor. There he nearly collided with the stranger, who had rushed out of a near office, and was heading for the street.

"The police—call the police!" he shouted, quite ghastly with dismay and excitement.

"What's wrong?" Nick demanded, detaining him.

"My clerk has been murdered! Call the police and a doctor. Don't stop me. Don't delay——"

"Hold on!" Nick exclaimed, still restraining the excited man. "A doctor can do no good if your clerk is dead. Let's be sure you are right. I am an officer."

"A policeman?"

"A detective. My name is Nick Carter."

"Good heavens! How fortunate that you——"

"Ah, I see! Wait one moment. This man is not dead."

Nick had, while speaking, urged his companion back into the office from which he had emerged, leaving the door wide open. A sign on it caught the detective's eye and revealed the name and business of the tenant—William Rudd, real estate and insurance agent.

One glance around the office, moreover, explained Rudd's excitement and dismay. It was a well-furnished office, containing two roll-top desks, a table near one of the walls, a large safe, several leather-covered chairs, and a telephone on a stand in one corner. A large rug covered much of the floor, and several attractive engravings adorned the walls.

On the floor near the middle of the room lay a slender, neatly clad man of thirty, who, at first sight, appeared to be dead. Nick quickly saw that his paleness was not that of death, however, while a lurid bruise on one side of his forehead told quite plainly what had befallen him.

"Not dead!" Rudd exclaimed, with manifest relief. "Are you sure of it?"

"Positively," said Nick, closing the door and hastening to examine the stricken clerk. "He is worth a regiment of dead men. He has been knocked out with a sandbag. Bring some water. I can quickly revive him."

Mr. Rudd rushed into a corner closet, returning with a tumbler of water, with which Nick proceeded to bathe the head and face of the unconscious clerk. In the meantime, recalling his earlier suspicions, he asked somewhat pointedly:

"What led you to suspect this?"

"Suspect it?" questioned the other.

"Yes. You are Mr. Rudd, I take it."

"Certainly. But I suspected nothing of this kind."

"What did you suspect, then?" Nick persisted. "You certainly knew, or feared, that there was something wrong here."

"Why do you make that assertion, Mr. Carter?"

"Because I read it plainly in your face when you entered the building."

Mr. William Rudd had pulled himself together. He saw a tinge of color appear in the pale cheeks of the clerk, which convinced him that the detective was right, and that the worst was not nearly as bad as he had feared. He sat down, replying quickly:

"You have sharp eyes, Mr. Carter, and evidently deserve your very enviable reputation. I did, indeed, suspect something wrong."

"For what reason, Mr. Rudd?"

"I can explain in a nutshell. My telephone rang about twenty minutes ago, while I was at work here with Crandall," Rudd proceeded, signifying with a gesture that he referred to his clerk. "I answered the call, Mr. Carter, and the person who had rung me up stated that he was Mr. Charles Hathaway, who is the president of one of our largest cotton mills, and also a very good friend of mine."

"Did you recognize his voice?" asked Nick, beginning to anticipate what was coming.

"I did not. I suspected nothing wrong, however, for voices do not always sound familiar by telephone."

"Very true. What was wanted?"

"Hathaway, or so I supposed, stated that he wanted to add to the insurance on some of his accumulated stock, and he asked me to come immediately to his office, that a policy might be executed to-day. I replied that I would do so, and I lost no time in starting for the mill. It looked to me like a good stroke of business. Much to my surprise, however, after walking about half the distance, I met Hathaway on the street. Imagine my amazement, Mr. Carter, when he informed me that he had no intention of adding to his insurance, and also that he had not telephoned to me."

"I have heard of such cases," Nick said dryly. "Obviously, Mr. Rudd, it was a ruse to get you out of your office for a time. You suspected that, I infer, also that there might be something wrong here."

"Exactly," Rudd said quickly. "That is why my face betrayed me, evidently, when I was hurriedly returning. But I suspected nothing of this kind, nor, in fact, anything definite. I could conceive of no plausible motive for such a ruse."

"Is your safe locked?"

"Yes. I scattered the combination before I went out."

"Were there any valuables here for crooks to secure?"

"None whatever. My books and policies have no intrinsic value, and there seldom is much money in the safe. If Crandall could only speak and explain——"

"He will presently do so," Nick interrupted. "It takes time for the human system to throw off the effects of such a crack on the head. Be patient."

"Hadn't I better call a physician?"

"It will not be necessary. The young man will, unless I am much mistaken, revive before a physician could be brought here."

Nick had arisen from beside the prostrate clerk, and again was gazing around the office. He was somewhat puzzled. There appeared to have been no attempt at robbery, yet the ruse obviously adopted, together with the brutal assault upon the clerk, pointed plainly to a criminal job of some kind.

"With the exception of Crandall, everything appears to be just as I left it," said Mr. Rudd, observing Nick's searching scrutiny. "Did some enemy of Crandall lure me away merely in order to assault him?"

"I don't think so," said Nick. "He would not have gone to so much trouble."

"There is absolutely no evidence, then, in explanation of the mystery."

"Don't be so sure of that. Did you leave Crandall alone here when you went out?"

"Yes."

"Had you had any visitors within an hour?"

"No, none."

"Had either of you been out since lunch?"

"No."

"Did you use the telephone, or approach it, after finding Crandall in this condition?"

"I did not. I rushed out to find a policeman and a doctor. I might more wisely have telephoned, of course, but I really overlooked that in my excitement."

"Here is evidence of some significance, then."

"What do you mean?"

"This dampness on the floor near the telephone stand Some one with wet boots has recently used the instrument. You say that you did not, and the soles of Crandall's shoes are perfectly dry," said Nick, pointing. "Presumably, then, the telephone was used by Crandall's assailant."

"By Jove, that admits of no argument," cried Rudd, gazing at the moisture on the floor. "But why did he assault my clerk? If he was using the phone——"

"Wait one moment," Nick interrupted. "I will call up the telephone exchange and try to learn with whom he talked. That may shed some light on—ah, but it may not be necessary. Crandall will be in shape to explain in another moment. Open one of the windows, Mr. Rudd, and let in some fresh air."

A low moan from the clerk had occasioned the digression. He was breathing more deeply, while his fluttering eyelids plainly denoted that he was on the verge of returning consciousness.

Nick knelt down and raised him from the floor, whereupon Crandall started slightly and suddenly opened his eyes, gazing with a dazed expression at the detective's face.

"What's happened?" he muttered. "Why——"

"Don't be in a hurry, Mr. Crandall," Nick interrupted. "Take your time. You'll be all right in half a minute."

"But why——"

"You'll presently understand. Lend a hand, Mr. Rudd, and we'll place him in his chair. You were assaulted and knocked out, Crandall, by some man who——"

"Oh, by thunder!" Crandall suddenly cried. "I remember! I now remember all about it. Has he escaped? Did he——"

"Not too fast," cautioned Nick. "Drink this glass of water. That will put you right."

"Oh, I'm feeling better, sir."

"Very good. Now, Mr. Rudd, if you'll be seated, we'll hear what Crandall can tell us about this affair."

CHAPTER II.

A CRAFTY SWINDLE.

As Nick Carter had predicted, it had taken only a short time to revive the stricken clerk. Not more than ten minutes had passed, during which Nick had also superficially sized up the circumstances. With characteristic insight, and a judgment born of long experience, he already had come to a conclusion that the doings in Rudd's office that afternoon were only minor features of a much more serious crime.

Restored to a normal condition, Archie Crandall was a frank, clean-cut, determined type of man, who evidently possessed all of the qualities necessary to have brought upon himself the assault resulting in his downfall.

"I will explain as briefly as possible, Mr. Carter," said he, after Nick had introduced himself and stated what had transpired. "You had been gone from the office less than five minutes, Mr. Rudd, when a man entered and asked for you. I told him——"

"One moment, Crandall," Nick interposed. "There probably is much more to this case than appears on the surface. Let me bring out as many facts as possible while you proceed. Describe the man in a general way."

"Very well, sir," said Crandall, bowing. "He is about forty years old, of medium height, quite compact and muscular, with dark eyes, hair, and complexion, and he wears a full beard. He was well dressed in a dark suit, with a soft felt hat and a gray raincoat. He appeared like a gentleman, in fact, when he entered and questioned me."

"His full beard may have been a disguise," said Nick. "Proceed now with your story. What followed?"

"I told him Mr. Rudd had gone out and might not return this afternoon," Crandall continued. "He then said that he wanted to confer with him on a business matter, and that he expected a friend to meet him here, or to telephone to him if unable to join him."

"Ah, I see," said Nick, nodding. "Naturally, of course, you invited him to sit down and wait for his friend—or the telephone communication."

"That is precisely what I did, Mr. Carter."

"And precisely what he knew you would do," said Nick. "He was contriving in a very simple, yet equally clever way, to respond to a telephone communication from some person who, probably at the suggestion of a confederate then engaged in knavery of some kind, would call up Mr. Rudd at about that time."

"As if I were the person replying?" questioned Rudd.

"Exactly."

"What a dastardly trick!"

"It is not a new one," replied the detective. "It first was necessary, of course, to insure your absence at the time, which was accomplished by the phone appointment supposed to have been made by Hathaway, the mill president. In that again appears the work of the rascal's confederate. Go on, Crandall, if you please. What did he have to say for himself while waiting?"

"He said that he represented several capitalists who were contemplating the establishment of a plant here for making mill machinery, and that he was here with a companion to confer with some of the mill managers about the project, also to learn whether a desirable site could be obtained. He then began to question me about the cost of insurance, but we had been talking only a few moments when the telephone rang."

"Which he, of course, hastened to answer," Nick remarked.

"So quickly, Mr. Carter, that it aroused my first feeling of distrust," said Crandall. "He glanced at me with a nod and smile after placing the receiver to his ear, however, signifying that it was the expected communication from his friend."

"Tell me just what he said, Crandall, as near as you can remember," Nick directed.

"I can recall every word, Mr. Carter, for my misgivings led me to listen and watch him. It began with an affirmative reply, as if stating that he was the party required. Then, after listening for several moments, so long that I wondered what his friend could be saying to him, he answered assuringly: 'Yes, indeed, it's all right, and just as I directed. I have been expecting you to call me up.'"

"And then?"

"After listening briefly, Mr. Carter, he again replied: 'Those statements are entirely correct. I would come around there if a business appointment did not prevent me. I know the orders to be all right.'"

"Orders, eh?" Nick muttered, with brows knitting.

"That was the word he used."

"What more was said?"

"He evidently replied to another question, saying, with what appeared like some little confusion: 'I did not have so much on hand, nor could I obtain it before to-morrow, it being after three o'clock. I'll come, of course, if you insist upon it, but it will put me to much inconvenience. There really is no occasion. You'll find them all right, and—ah, very well, then. Thank you."

"That was all?"

"Yes."

"He evidently had obtained what he wanted."

"So I inferred."

"What followed?" Nick inquired.

Crandall drew up in his chair.

"As I have said, I had begun to suspect the man," he replied. "What I had heard, moreover, greatly increased my suspicions. It did not sound right to me. I arose when he hung up the receiver, therefore, and stepped between him and the door. He also arose and remarked that his friend could not meet him, and that he would call again to-morrow."

"And you?"

"I insisted that he should wait a few moments and tell me where his friend had phoned from. He saw at once that I distrusted him. I then detected a threatening gleam in his eyes, but I don't back down to any man, and I was determined to know the truth."

"Good for you," Nick said approvingly.

"The man did not reply and I repeated my question, adding that he must wait until I had made sure that his statements were true. Then he bluntly declared that I must be out of my head, at the same time attempting to pass me and reach the door. I thrust him back, insisting that he should remain, and then I turned to lock the door and remove the key."

"An unfortunate move, Crandall, on your part," said Nick. "I'll wager he took advantage of it."

"You win," replied Crandall, with a grimace. "But I was not looking for violence right off the reel. It came like a flash. The rascal leaped after me the instant I turned, and I caught sight of a weapon in his uplifted hand. I tried in vain to avoid the blow. It caught me on the side of my head and dazed me. I staggered against the wall, and then—well, he struck me again, and that settled it. I went down and out as if floored by a thunderbolt. I knew no more until——"

"Until I revived you," put in Nick.

"Exactly."

"That covers, I think, all that you can tell me. You have no idea where the phone call came from?"

"Not the slightest."

"We must lose no time in finding out," Nick declared, hastening to the telephone. "Obviously, Mr. Rudd, a false identification has been established by means of a communication supposed to have come from you."

"False identification?"

"Precisely."

"But for what purpose?"

"That of obtaining the cash for written orders of some kind," said Nick. "I can see plainly through the ambiguity with which the rascal tried to deceive Crandall when replying to—— But we shall see. It was too late for a bank job. I'll try the post office. The orders referred to may have been—money orders."

Nick had found the required number while speaking, and a moment later he was in communication with the local postmaster, Mr. Thomas Dakin. He then learned that he had with his first conjecture hit the nail on the head.

Instead of obtaining the details by telephone, however, Nick made himself known to Dakin, stating that he would hasten to join him and asking him to take no previous steps in the matter. Then, having requested Rudd and Crandall to await his return, Nick hastened to the post office and was admitted to Dakin's private office, where the latter was seated in conversation with his money-order clerk, Carl Morton, both much disturbed by the swindle.

"I wonder at the instructions you gave me, Mr. Carter," said Dakin, after their greeting. "Why did you ask me to delay? I think the police should be notified at once and immediate steps taken to trace and arrest the criminals."

"That may best be done, perhaps, by proceeding with deliberation," Nick replied. "Undoubtedly, Mr. Dakin, the crooks have effectively guarded themselves against immediate discovery and arrest. After learning all of the circumstances, I may be able to point out the best way for the police to handle the case."

"Possibly. It won't take long to tell you what occurred here."

"Do so, then."

"About an hour ago, a fashionably dressed woman presented three money orders at Morton's window and wanted the cash. Two are for one hundred dollars each, the other for fifty, all ostensibly issued by the postmaster of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They appear to be perfectly genuine, yet the amount is so large that Morton called my attention to the matter."

"You talked with the woman?"

"Yes. I told her that she must bring some person to identify her. She then stated that her home is in Milwaukee, and that the money orders were sent to her by an aunt with whom she resides, but who carries no bank account enabling her to have sent a check."

"I follow you," said Nick. "What more?"

"She also said that she now is visiting Mr. William Rudd, with whom I am acquainted, and that she had mentioned the money orders to him and the fact that she might have to be identified. He told her to have me telephone to his office, she said, where he had an important engagement this afternoon, and that he would convince me of her identity. That, as a matter of fact, is all there was to it. I called Rudd up and talked with him—or supposed I did."

"Did you feel any doubt of it?" Nick inquired.

"Not the slightest. I had looked up his phone number and knew I must be in communication with his office. That anything was wrong there did not enter my head. I did not even think of trickery, in so far as that part of the job is concerned."

"That is not strange," Nick allowed.

"I was told that the woman's statements were true, also that she——"

"I know precisely what the crook told you," Nick interrupted, and he then informed his hearers what had occurred in Rudd's office.

"Plainly, then, I have been swindled out of two hundred and fifty dollars," said Dakin disgustedly.

"That's about the size of it."

"And that's not the worst feature of it. Other offices may be swindled in the same way. This evidently is the work of a gang of professional crooks."

"Undoubtedly."

"But who are they? How long have they been at this work? Where did they get the money-order blanks? The police must be notified. The department in Washington must be informed. This is a serious matter."

"So serious, Mr. Dakin, we cannot employ too much craft and caution in getting after the rascals," Nick said more gravely. "Publicity and the bungling efforts of the police, inexperienced in subtle detective work, will not help matters. The result would be quite the contrary, in that the crooks would become doubly wary and flee to parts unknown."

"What would you suggest, Mr. Carter?" Dakin earnestly questioned. "I am willing, of course, to be guided by one of your acumen and experience."

"Very good," Nick replied. "I advise you, then, to let me take charge of the case for the present. I will remain here until to-morrow, at least, and then will either continue my investigations, or tell the local police what I may in the meantime discover, as well as how they best may continue the work."

"But the department in Washington must be notified," Dakin insisted.

"I will attend to that, also, and will assume all responsibility for any delay," Nick assured him.

"That's good enough for me."

"There are points in connection with this swindle," Nick added, "of which I think I can take advantage. Who in this office knows about it?"

"Only Morton and myself."

"You have told no one?" questioned Nick, turning to the money-order clerk.

"No, sir." Morton quickly shook his head. "I did not know about it until Mr. Dakin called me in here after you informed him. We then continued to discuss it until you arrived."

"Very good. We will give the matter no publicity, then, at present," said Nick. "That will lead the crooks to infer that Crandall did not know to whom his assailant was talking, also that the crime had not been discovered, and that there is no occasion for hasty flight. I will return and caution Rudd and Crandall to say nothing about the matter. First, however, give me a description of the woman who cashed the money orders."

Mr. Dakin hastened to comply, after which Nick hurriedly departed, returning to Rudd's office for the purpose mentioned, and then proceeding to the Mellen House for supper. It was nearly six o'clock when he entered the hotel, where one of the clerks quickly beckoned him to the desk and stated:

"There has been a long-distance telephone call for you, Mr. Carter. It came from your New York office. The name given was Chick Carter. He wants you to call him up."

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN FROM WASHINGTON.

Nick Carter spent no time in vain conjectures as to what was wanted by his chief assistant. Within five minutes he was in communication with his Madison Avenue residence, and he heard the familiar voice of Chick Carter over the wire.

"Hello! That you, Nick?"

"Yes."

"This is Chick talking."

"I get you. What's up?"

"How long is that Fall River case to detain you? When do you expect to return?"

"Why? Something doing?"

"Yes. Colonel Arthur Dudley, the assistant postmaster general, is here from Washington to see you. The government wants you to investigate a series of money-order swindles, the work of a gang that has proved too clever and elusive for the department detectives.

"By Jove, this is some coincidence," flashed through Nick's mind.

"Dudley says he will join you in Fall River to-morrow, if you are likely to be detained there several days," Chick continued. "It's an important case. What shall I tell him?"

Nick already had decided. He knew Colonel Dudley very well, also that his own services would be required by the government only in an emergency case. Quickly, too, he reasoned that his connection with the crimes committed that afternoon might possibly be known by the perpetrators, and that his subsequent movements might be watched. He at once resolved upon a course to avoid espionage and indicate that he intended dropping the case.

"Hello!" he called, after a moment.

"Come on with it," said Chick.

"I want you, Dudley, and Patsy Garvan to join me here to-morrow," Nick directed, anticipating that he might also require the help of his junior assistant.

"All three?" questioned Chick.

"Yes. You will find me at the Mellen House, registered as John Greenleaf. Do you get the name?"

"Yes—John Greenleaf."

"Travel in disguise, all three, pretending to be drummers, and bring what you may require later in that line. A money-order swindle was committed here this afternoon. Come prepared to work in this locality, therefore. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. I'll make sure that our identity is not suspected."

"Very good. Get away on the midnight."

"Surely."

"Join me in my room here to-morrow morning."

"Without delay."

"That's all, then. Good-by."

Nick hung up the receiver. Ten minutes later he paid his hotel bill, stating that he was going to New York by boat. He boarded the palatial sound steamer half an hour later, carrying a suit case. He disembarked in disguise just before the boat left the pier, however, and at eight o'clock that evening he returned to the Mellen House and registered as—John Greenleaf, Boston.

Nick telephoned to both Rudd and Dakin during the next hour, telling what had occurred, and repeating his instructions concerning secrecy in regard to the swindle, as well as the assault in Rudd's office, and added that he thereafter would take entire charge of the case. He directed both, moreover, to again caution their clerks against disclosing any of the circumstances.

Among the half score of arrivals at the Mellen House the following morning were three men in the guise of commercial travelers. They entered separately, and appeared to be strangers to one another. They were Chick Carter and Patsy Garvan, the detective's chief aids, and Colonel Dudley, of the post-office department in Washington.

Nine o'clock found them secretly closeted in the suite then occupied by Nick, Colonel Dudley being the last to stealthily enter. He was a portly, dignified man in the fifties, who long had held his important government position, and with whom the famous New York detective enjoyed very friendly relations. Their greeting was most cordial, therefore, after Dudley had removed the disguise with which Chick had provided him.

A brief discussion followed, during which Nick stated what had occurred the previous day, and why he had directed his hearers to join him in Fall River.

"It looks very much, Dudley, as if my work is to begin in this locality, providing your mission is what I was led to suppose," he remarked in concluding. "Let's get at it now without further delay. How serious is the trouble and what has been done about it?"

"It is exceedingly serious," Colonel Dudley replied. "Much has been done, too, but very little has been accomplished. That is why I determined to call upon you for aid."

"Begin at the beginning and tell me the whole business."

"That will carry me back about four months, Nick, when the first of these money-order swindles was discovered."

"Not so very long ago, then."

"Long enough, nevertheless, for the crooks to have cleaned up nearly ten thousand dollars."

"H'm, is that so?"

"Their first work was done in Springfield, Mass., and several neighboring cities and towns, all within a period of three days," Colonel Dudley proceeded. "The reports that soon poured into the department in Washington at once revealed the scope and dangerous character of the work, the careful preparations that have been made for it, and the skill with which our money-order blanks have been counterfeited. I have here the first batch of forged orders on which the rascals succeeded in obtaining the cash."

Colonel Dudley drew a bundle from his pocket while speaking, from which he selected about thirty canceled money orders from among nearly two hundred which the package contained.

"As you will see," he continued, handing them to Nick. "they are drawn on several different offices, including Springfield, Holyoke, Chicopee, Palmer, North Brookfield, and other near points, all of which could easily have been visited in a couple of days by the several members of the gang."

"I see," said Nick.

"All of them ostensibly are issued by distant offices, moreover, with which telephone communication could not be easily had, and obviously with a design to cash all of the orders before the first swindle should be reported. They aggregate nearly eight hundred dollars, most of them being of moderate size, which few postmasters would refuse to cash without identification of the bearer. All of them, you see, are dated early in June."

Nick examined them while the other was speaking, noting the several facts mentioned, as well as other points to which he presently referred.

"It's the work of a clever gang, Nick, all right," Chick remarked, already having been informed of the details.

"Gee! something more than clever," supplemented Patsy. "It don't look like soft walking to round them up."

Nick did not reply to these comments. Instead, he said inquiringly:

"If I am correctly informed, Dudley, the money-order books in general use are supplied by the government to the various post offices throughout the country?"

"That is correct," said Dudley. "They are made much in the form of check books, and supplied in quantities corresponding with the amount of business done by the offices. They are issued in series, printed in red, as you can see, as well as the post-office number."

"Each office has a distinctive number?"

"Yes."

"Are those on these counterfeits correct?"

"Yes, invariably."

"And the postmaster's name?"

"Yes. In many cases, too, the postmaster's signature is very skillfully forged."

"All of which denotes that the crooks not only have thoroughly informed themselves and guarded against detection when presenting a counterfeit order, but also that there must be a very clever forger among them."

"Undoubtedly," Colonel Dudley agreed.

"Is his identity known, or suspected?"

"Neither."

"Or that of any of the gang?"

"No. We have descriptions of them, however, obtained in localities where their crimes have been committed. The gang comprises half a dozen persons, at least."

"I have no great faith in descriptions, Dudley," said Nick. "Crooks engaged in swindles of this kind nearly always work in disguises. We must find some other way by which to trace and identify them. I'll get at that a little later."

"I hope so, surely."

"As a matter of fact," Nick added, "postmasters have no great protection against frauds of this kind."

"No more than a bank clerk has when a check is presented by a stranger," Colonel Dudley admitted. "The old method of sending vouchers to the office on which an order is drawn has been abolished. Identification is in reality the only safeguard."

"Which, as was demonstrated yesterday, is not always effective," said Nick dryly. "Are postmasters supposed to have all persons identified who present money orders?"

"That's up to them, Nick. They are allowed to use their own discretion. These orders are no different from checks, and they may be used as such. Most of them are for small amounts, however, the limit being one hundred dollars, and postmasters are put upon their own judgment in regard to cashing them without the precaution of having the holders identified."

"I understand," said Nick.

"There were, as you will also see, only two courses that the government could consistently take after the felonies were discovered," Colonel Dudley proceeded. "One was to give them general publicity, with instructions to all officers that no money orders should be cashed without positive identification of the holders. That would, however, have put holders and postmasters to constant delay and serious inconvenience, and while it might prevent repetition of the crimes, it did not appeal to us as being most feasible."

"I see the point," Nick replied. "It strikes me, Dudley, that secrecy would be the better course, with covert steps to apprehend and wipe out the rascals. Otherwise, they will continue to be a constant menace, in spite of all the precautions you can take."

"That expresses our views to the letter. Accordingly, Nick, half a dozen of our best men were put upon the case. They were sent to Springfield, and other near cities in which the crimes were committed. Their efforts proved futile, however, and while they still were at work in that locality, reports came in of like frauds in Lynn, Salem, Haverhill, Lawrence, and Lowell."

"The work of the same gang."

"Undoubtedly. That appears in the writing on the counterfeit money orders cashed in those cities," said Colonel Dudley, selecting them from the package and placing them on the table.

Nick merely glanced at them.

"The rascals had made a change of base," he observed.

"Exactly," said Dudley. "Our detectives were immediately notified. They hastened to Lynn, to Salem, and to each of the cities mentioned, feeling sure they were hot on the trail of the crooks, and could speedily corner them. The offices were watched. A detective was concealed near each of the money-order windows. The hotels were visited, and suspicious strangers were placed under espionage."

"With what result?"

"All of these efforts again proved vain. They still were in progress, moreover, when reports came of another big haul by the same crooks in Concord, Manchester, Nashua, and Keene, near cities in New Hampshire."

"Gee! it looks as if the rascals were out to clean up New England," said Patsy, who sat listening.

"How long a time elapsed, Dudley, between each of these operations?" Nick inquired.

"About a month, Nick, in each case."

"And the actual work of cashing the money orders in the several cities in each locality occupied only a few days?"

"Exactly."

"Obviously, then, the balance of the time was given to paving the way to cashing the orders without much chance of detection."

"Well, very likely," Colonel Dudley thoughtfully admitted. "That view of the matter has not occurred to me."

"And very evidently, Dudley, it has not occurred to your detectives," Nick said pointedly, smiling.

"What do you imply by that?" questioned the Washington official, with a look of surprise.

Instead of explaining his remark, however, Nick said inquiringly:

"As a matter of fact, Dudley, as I understand it, they have not accomplished anything of importance?"

"Next to nothing, Nick, I admit. They have obtained, of course, descriptions of the persons who cashed the orders——"

"Those cut no ice," Nick repeated, interrupting. "I'll wager they have varied in each and every case."

"Well, that is true, also," Colonel Dudley further admitted.

"It does not surprise me, in fact, that your detectives have met with no great success," Nick added. "They have not gone at their work in the right way."

"The right way?"

"Exactly."

"You surprise me. What way would you suggest?"

Nick laughed a bit oddly, and shook his head.

"Frankly, Dudley, I'm not prepared to say," he replied.

"But you must have some reason for asserting——"

"Only that they could not possibly succeed by following the course you have mentioned," Nick again interrupted. "I do not care to discuss, however, in what respects they have failed. Let's come to Hecuba. Do you want me to undertake this case?"

"Surely!" Colonel Dudley eagerly exclaimed. "That's why I am here."

"Will you leave that package of money orders for me to examine?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

"I will see that they are safely returned to you."

"That's good enough for me, Nick."

"I suppose that you are very busy in Washington all the while," Nick digressed, smiling.

"Busy!" Colonel Dudley exclaimed. "That hardly expresses it."

"I imagine so."

"I scarce could spare time to come on here."

"Of course, then, you are impatient to return," said Nick, glancing at his watch. "A train leaves in ten minutes, Dudley, that will enable you to hit the fast express in Providence."

Colonel Dudley gazed at him with augmented surprise.

"Do you mean——" he began.

"Only that you can accomplish nothing more by remaining here," Nick put in. "You may return to Washington as soon as you like, therefore, and leave to me the work of rounding up these forgers."

"Can you do it?"

"I think so."

"When? How soon?"

"Well, if I were to set a time limit, I should say," drawled Nick quizzically, "within three or four days."

Colonel Dudley sprang to his feet.

"Three or four days!" he cried amazedly.

"As soon as that," said Nick.

"You're not joking, Carter?"

"I never was more serious."

"Three or four days, eh?"

"About that."

Colonel Dudley glanced at his watch, then seized the detective by the hand.

"In that case, Nick, I'll be off for Washington," he cried. "Good-by, Chick. So long, Garvan. Three or four days—that would sound like rot, Nick, coming from any other man. Coming from you—well, I know you're not given to boasting. But you'll have to show me—you'll have to show me!"

"I'll show you, Dudley, all right," replied Nick, as they shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER IV.

NICK FINDS A CLEW.

"Gee! it strikes me, chief, that you've taken a big bite out of a hard, green apple. I hope you've not bit off more than you can chew."

These remarks, sententiously uttered, came from Patsy Garvan when Nick turned after closing the door upon the departing figure of the Washington official.

"More than I can chew, eh?" Nick echoed, laughing.

"That's what."

"No, I don't think so, Patsy."

"Mebbe not. But, as Colonel Dudley said, chief—you'll have to show me," said Patsy.

"That is precisely what I intend to do," Nick replied. "I got rid of Dudley, moreover, only that we might lose no time in getting to our job. It must, unless I have shot wide of the mark, be in record time. Pull up here, both of you, and we'll see what more can be learned from these counterfeit money orders."

Nick drew up a chair to a table on which the package of money orders then was lying, while both Chick and Patsy hastened to follow suit.

"Evidently, Nick, you already have deduced something from them," said Chick.

"True."

"Otherwise, you would not so readily have taken on a case in which the government detectives have failed."

"No wonder they failed," said Nick. "They're like a man who locks the stable after his horse is stolen. They have in every instance arrived upon the scene of the crime—after it was committed."

"And after the crooks had bolted," added Patsy.

"Exactly."

"You deduce that from these money orders?" questioned Chick.

"Certainly," said Nick, gathering them in front of him. "That was obvious to me while Colonel Dudley was talking. Let's examine them more carefully. I'll wager there is something more to be learned, and other advantages to be derived from them."

"My money goes on that, chief, once you get your eyes on them," said Patsy confidently.

Nick then began a more searching examination of the forged orders, placing them in three piles corresponding with the three periods when the crimes were committed.

"We'll begin with the first," said he. "That job was done in June, in and around Springfield. The orders are drawn to fictitious names, and, of course, are valueless in our investigations. The paper, however, must have been made by the gang, since the theft of money-order books bearing so many numbers would have been impossible."

"I questioned Colonel Dudley about that," said Chick. "He is sure that no order books have been stolen from the department in Washington. To have stolen them from the different offices would, as you say, have been impossible."

"There are several large paper manufactories up Springfield and Holyoke way, where these rascals first got in their work," Nick replied. "While none of them is probably involved, it is quite possible that one of the gang may have been employed in one of the paper mills, and thus have learned how the government paper could be perfectly imitated."

"By Jove, there may be something in that."

"Unless other plans which I have in view prove futile, we'll find out whether any skillful paper maker quit his job in that locality last June."

"It would be worth while," Chick agreed. "We might thus identify one of the gang, and succeed in tracing him."

"There is a better and more expeditious way, Chick, to begin with," said Nick.

"Namely?"

"Observe several significant facts in connection with these swindles. They occurred at intervals of about a month, were perpetrated within a period of three or four days, and always in cities within quick reach by rail, or motor car."

"That's true."

"Plainly, then, the gang is working along definite lines, beginning with a selection of cities within easy reach, where the rascals presumably make a study of the post offices, the people, and the surroundings, and in the meantime prepare the money order for presentation."

"That appears to have been their game."

"Here are about twenty money orders that were deposited in a bank in Salem. One of the gang evidently contrived to open an account, drawing out the cash after having deposited the bogus orders, all of which are apparently issued by Western post offices, so remote that the fraud would not be exposed before the crook could consistently draw against the deposit."

"The dates show that it was done just before the gang left that locality."

"Exactly," said Nick. "That confirms my suspicion that they established a headquarters in some suitable city, and that they get in none of their work until after sizing up the entire situation, when they devote three or four days to making a general clean-up, and then bolt for some other locality."

"Sure thing!" commented Patsy. "That appears in the fact that about a month passed between each clean-up."

"And about a month has passed since the last one, that committed in Concord and other near cities," said Nick pointedly.

"You suspect that they are about attempting another?" Chick questioned quickly.

"Precisely."

"And that yesterday's job was one step in their work?"

"Yes."

"The gang may, then, be located right here in Fall River."

"I don't think so."

"Why?"

"Because this is the only hotel at which some, if not all of them, would be likely to stop, and I know they are not here."

"How did you learn?"

"I have examined the hotel register very carefully, covering a period of more than a month. I had in mind, of course, the handwriting on the counterfeit orders that were cashed here yesterday."

"Ah, I see!" Chick exclaimed. "You were looking for the same writing on the register."

"Certainly," Nick rejoined. "All of these orders must, of course, have been made out by the members of the gang, chiefly by one of them, and very presumably its leader. For the writing on about three-quarters of them is that of the same hand, though evidently disguised in many cases. This writing will, I think, enable us to discover where—hold on! By Jove, here's a clew!"

Nick's gaze was fixed upon one of the counterfeit orders, many of which he had been inspecting during the discussion. He was an expert chirographist. He was, moreover, gifted in a remarkable degree with a faculty for remembering not only distinctive characteristics of any particular hand, but also the identity of the writer, even during a period of years. Nick had trained his mind along this line, in fact, and he saw at once that he had made an important discovery.

"A clew?" Chick echoed inquiringly.

"Gee!" Patsy exclaimed. "Didn't I predict it?"

"What is it, Nick?"

"Do you remember Ambrose Floyd?"

"Ambrose Floyd—well, I should say so," Chick cried. "Expert forger, counterfeiter, and all-round slick crook. We sent him to the Eastern Penitentiary for ten years for forging a lot of Alton Railway bonds."

"When??" inquired Nick.

"Well, let me see, it must have been——"

"I'll tell you just when," Nick interrupted. "It was in August, nineteen hundred and five, and with reductions for good behavior, Floyd's term would have expired eight months ago."

"Do you know that he is out?"

"I didn't know it—but I now do," said Nick pointedly. "I also know, Chick, that he is the big finger of this gang."

"The dickens! Why so?"

"Do you remember any peculiarity in his writing?"

"H'm! I can't say that I do."

"He is one of the most skillful penmen I know," said Nick. "He can counterfeit a signature almost perfectly after merely glancing at it. When writing offhand, however, he has one habit of which he never was able to entirely break himself."

"What was that?"

"That of using the old style s with a loop above and below the line."

"Humph! that's right, too," Chick nodded. "I do remember it, now. It's mentioned in his gallery card."

"That form of the letter is not used by one person in a million in these days," said Nick. "It is almost obsolete. It appears in this money order, nevertheless, though it is partly effaced by the ordinary form of letter quite heavily written over it. See for yourself."

"It's as plain as twice two," said Patsy, also gazing at it.

"By Jove, you have a wonderful memory, Nick," said Chick. "This evidence is incontestable."

"And in view of the fact that this work is directly in line with his criminal record, it's quite safe to assume that Ambrose Floyd is the man we want."

"Why do you think him the chief of this gang?"

"For two reasons," Nick pointed out: "One, because nearly all of these counterfeit orders are written by the same hand in which this old form of the letter appears. Second, because Ambrose Floyd never plays second fiddle to any man. He invariably handles the ribbons."

"That's right, too, Nick, as I remember him. He certainly was a bad egg."

"This old form of letter slipped in upon him inadvertently from force of habit, evidently while he was writing hurriedly. For he did not take time to destroy the money order and write a new one. That it would ever betray him did not, in all probability, even enter his head."

"Nor would it have done so, Nick, unless you were the one to see it. It would have escaped every other observer—bar none."

Nick did not reply to the compliment. He replaced the telltale money order among the others, saying, with manifest satisfaction:

"Now, having identified our man beyond any reasonable doubt, the next step is to discover where he and his gang are quartered."

"Have you any idea?"

"Yes."

"Based upon what?"

"Upon their conduct in each of the previous clean-ups," said Nick. "They were evidently quartered in one of the several cities in which they got in their work."

"No doubt."

"They now have merely made a change of base in order to operate in several other near cities. Fall River being one of them, as appeared yesterday, it's a reasonably safe gamble that they now have a headquarters either in New Bedford, Taunton, Brockton, or Attleboro."

"Why not in Providence?"

"Because it's quite remote from any of the others and less convenient by rail. Also that it would more likely be included with Newport, Westerly, and neighboring cities, if the rascals were inclined to work in that locality. Take it from me, Chick, they're within the circle mentioned."

"How to find them, then, is the question," said Chick.

"I think that may be quickly done," Nick replied. "It must be done quickly, in fact, for the rascals are just about getting in their work before jumping to another locality. One successful move was made yesterday. We must try to catch them at their work and contrive to take in the whole gang."

"But we cannot easily cover the four cities mentioned," Chick contended.

"That will not be necessary," said Nick. "We'll concentrate our efforts in the city in which they have a headquarters. I'm sure it is not Fall River. We can learn which of the other four, I think, by means of Floyd's handwriting on these counterfeits."

"By inspecting the hotel registers in each city?"

"Exactly," said Nick. "Floyd probably is merely making out the orders and directing the work of his confederates. Where we find him, Chick, is where the headquarters of the gang is located. You may cover Brockton. Patsy may go to Taunton and Attleboro. I will take New Bedford. Both of you take one of these orders, giving you a specimen of Floyd's writing, and examine the register of each of the hotels. I'll do the same in New Bedford. One of us will, I feel sure, pick up the trail."

"By Jove, it's worth trying."

"Gee! I should say so," Patsy declared. "Suppose, chief, we wish to communicate with one another."

"Do so by telegram," said Nick. "My address will be the Parker House. Yours, Patsy, the City Hotel, Taunton. We'll wire you, Chick, to the Belmont, Brockton. Got them in your heads?"

"Yes," both quickly asserted.

"Understand," Nick added, "our first step must be to locate Ambrose Floyd. That done, we'll get together and plan to round up the entire outfit. Make no premature move, therefore, that would expose the fact that we are out to get them."

"We'll guard against that, Nick."

"You bet!" put in Patsy.

"That's all, then," said Nick. "Slip into a disguise and lose no time in reaching the points mentioned. I'll run over to New Bedford on the next trolley car."

CHAPTER V.

A BACK-ROOM EPISODE.

It was eleven o'clock that morning when Nick Carter, carefully disguised, alighted from a trolley car in New Bedford. He had been seriously considering the case during the ride of an hour from Fall River.

It did not impress him less seriously, but quite the contrary, in fact, since his discovery that Ambrose Floyd was the chief of the crook gang and directing its operations. He really had no doubt of it, now, and he knew of what Floyd was capable. He was thinking about him when he stepped from the car at the Union Street station.

"He's a keen and clever rogue, as crafty as a stable rat, daring without being indiscreet, always with an eye open for every threatening contingency, and as dangerous as a rattlesnake when caught in a corner," Nick was saying to himself. "He's a rascal of many resources, and he has remarkable executive ability, moreover, with much too good judgment to be in the running with a gang of cheap skates, or with crooks of inferior nerve and ability. One must come across good and strong,, in fact, to land Ambrose Floyd. I learned that many years ago, after he twice slipped through my fingers before I could bump him down and out with a ten years' sentence. I'll wager he has never forgotten, much less forgiven me."

Nick paused briefly on the corner of William Street, deciding what step he first would take in looking up his man. He was quite familiar with the old whaling city, with its hotels and banking institutions, and he was more than half inclined to visit the banks with a few inquiries to begin with, knowing that they closed at one o'clock for two hours, then reopening until five.

"This afternoon will do as well," he said to himself. "I'll start in with the hotels. It's barely possible that Chick or Patsy will have occasion to wire me at the Parker House."

Nick walked through Purchase Street in the direction of the hotel he had in mind. A small crowd of men and women on the sidewalk presently barred his way. They were gazing through the window of what appeared to be a vacant store.

Nick paused to see what interested them.

It was a large display window, on the floor of which a carpet had been laid. It also contained a plush couch and a small table. On the latter were a pan of meal and a dish of flour. Some of the latter was scattered on the carpet, also in the corners and tuftings of the couch.

Two neatly clad, prepossessing men in the window were demonstrating the efficiency of a vacuum cleaner.

One repeatedly covered parts of the carpet and couch with flour, or meal, energetically rubbing it in, and the other then proceeded to suck it out with the machine they were advertising.

A large pasteboard placard attached to a voluminous curtain that formed the backing of the window, hiding the interior of the store from view, except through an open door, was lettered in black: "Superior Vacuum Cleaner."

Nick Carter would not ordinarily have had any interest in such a demonstration. He would have moved on at once. Unable to easily pass through the crowd, however, and the street just then being blocked by several vehicles, Nick lingered and gazed into the window.

It was second nature to him to notice any inconsistency, however trivial. He saw that the placard not only was made of pasteboard, but also was nearly new. He wondered, almost unconsciously, why men engaged in such a business did not provide themselves with a more substantial sign.

This impression led Nick to scrutinize the two men more intently. Both were about thirty, one a thin-featured man of dark complexion. The other was a stocky, florid chap with red hair. Both were smoothly shaved.

Turning to a man at his elbow, whose bare head and a somewhat soiled butcher's frock denoted that he was employed in an adjoining market, Nick inquired:

"How long have these fellows been here?"

"Demonstrating?"

"Yes."

"Something like two weeks. They give this kind of a show twice each day. It's about time they quit for this morning."

"Are they doing much business?"

"Well, not overmuch, I reckon."

"Strangers, or do they reside here?"

"Strangers. I dunno where they hail from."

"What names?"

"Give it up. I never asked. Why don't you inquire inside?"

The man in the frock gazed at Nick as if wondering whether he had been taken for an information bureau, and Nick discontinued questioning him.

Another man, who was standing back of both, had overheard all that was said. He was in some respects a striking person, one at whom many observers would take a second look.

He was above medium height, but of slender build, with an erect, wiry, well-poised figure. He was about forty, but looked older, for his close-cut hair was gray, and his skin as pallid as that of an opium eater. In striking contrast, however, his eyes were black and as sharp as needles. His features were refined and clean-cut, his nose straight, his mouth and chin denoting firmness and tenacity. He wore a stubby gray mustache. He was clad in a fashionable plaid suit, and he carried a cane. He looked like a man of means, culture, and aristocratic tastes.

This man drew back a few steps after gazing intently at the back of Nick's head while the detective was speaking. He drew a pair of blue spectacles from his pocket, and put them on. His erect figure seemed to collapse slightly, becoming bowed, and he leaned upon his cane. He looked as if he had aged and was feeble.

Nick had not observed him. Nor did he when, turning from the man in the frock, he approached the open door and looked into the store. It was deep and narrow. There were no side windows. The curtain in front excluded much of the light, giving the interior a dim and cheerless aspect.

The store contained only a quantity of large packing cases, each marked Riggs & Gray, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Only one of these cases had been opened. From which two of the vacuum cleaners had apparently been removed. They had been taken apart, and were displayed in sections on a narrow counter.

A partition of sheathing divided the front of the store from a back room. The door was open, exposing other cases and a small pile of excelsior in the rear of the room.

There was no customer in the store. None in the gazing crowd outside appeared to have interest enough to enter. The only occupant of the store, aside from the two demonstrators in the window, was a brawny, dark-featured man of fifty. He was leaning against the counter, thoughtfully smoking a cigar.

Nick Carter's face also wore a thoughtful expression. He assumed an air of awakened interest and sauntered into the store, approaching the man near the counter.

One of the two in the window happened at that moment to observe—the man in blue spectacles. Without a change of countenance, barring a sudden slight paleness, he muttered quickly:

"Cut it short, Tommy."

"What's up?" Tommy whispered.

"Danger. The blue lamps are lighted."

The man in blue spectacles caught Tommy's eyes. He jerked his thumb significantly toward the interior of the shop, then swung round, and hurried south, turning down William Street and thence into Acushnet Avenue, which took him into a lower section back of the building occupied by the store described.

Oblivious to any of this, of course, Nick accosted the man at the counter.

"That appears to be a pretty good machine," he remarked agreeably.

"Yes, sir." The man straightened up and nodded. "None better, sir, as sure as my name is Philip Philbrick."

"That's a euphonious name, all right," laughed Nick.

Philbrick joined in the laugh.

"That's true," said he. "But I've always wondered why my daddy tacked on that front name. If he had only named me Joe, Jim, or Jack Philbrick, there would have been some sense in it. But Phil Philbrick—gosh! it's like talking with a mouth full of mush."

Nick laughed again and inquired:

"What's the machine cost?"

"Eighteen dollars for this size," said Philbrick, turning to the one on the counter. "This larger one costs twenty-two. We have a still larger size which can be used in hotels, or public buildings. It's adapted to—— All through, Tommy?"

"For now, Phil." Tommy had come out of the window. "I'll look after the bunch outside."

Philbrick nodded. For half a second a sharper gleam appeared in the depths of his dark eyes. It came and went too quickly to be noticed.

Nick continued his inquiries.

Tommy stepped to the door and smilingly checked a woman who appeared inclined to enter.

"Nothing doing till afternoon, madame," he very quietly informed her. "We have a business meeting with the mayor and the superintendent of public buildings in a very few minutes. Sorry, ma'am, but call this afternoon."

Nick heard none of this.

"Where are the machines made?" he was asking, while Tommy's companion in the window also emerged, passing Nick with a nod and smile and vanishing into the back room.

"They are made in Chicago," said Philbrick. "They are named for the great lake—Superior Vacuum Cleaner."

"Very appropriate."

"There's nothing better in the market. We have the New England agency, and can sell them at bed-rock prices to quantity buyers. Are you a merchant, a dealer in things of this kind, or——"

"I run a hotel in Bristol," Nick dryly interposed.

"Ah! They are just what you want, then. They're more needed in a hotel than——"

"Show the gentleman the largest size, Phil. Jerry has opened the one that arrived this morning while we have been demonstrating. It's in the back room."

The interruption was from the same man, who, now coming out of the back room, was drying his hands with a towel—as if his mission really had been only to wash them.

"Sure thing!" Philbrick quickly assented. "I want a look at it myself. Come with me, sir, and I'll show you the best article made in this line of truck. This way."

Nick was not averse to going farther. He really wanted to see what the back room contained. He had begun to form suspicions which impelled him much more forcibly than mere curiosity. He had leaned carelessly against two of the cases, pushing them slightly, and he had found that they were—empty.

For what reason should the store itself, which was only commodious enough for a few customers, be obstructed with—empty cases?

Nick had asked himself this question, and while moving toward the back room he asked Philbrick another.

"Do the machines come packed in these cases?"

"Yes, sure." Philbrick turned and nodded. "We have about sixty of the small and medium sizes on hand. One of the largest came in this morning. We'll have a look at it."

"I suppose——"

No more of the remark on the detective's lips was ever uttered.

Philbrick had strode into the back room while speaking.

Nick had followed him.

Then like a bolt from the blue came a blow from behind, a blow dealt with a slung shot in the hand of a man concealed back of the door—the man with the blue spectacles.

He needed hardly to stir from his position when the detective entered.. He was ready for him, holding the brutal weapon uplifted. It fell like a flash, and with a force as infernal as the expression on his pasty-white face.

It caught Nick squarely on the head. With a half-choked moan, with his knees quickly buckling, with the bright light of day turned to sudden inky darkness, he dropped heavily upon the floor, as dead to the world as if felled by a thunderbolt.

Philbrick swung round to lend a hand, whipping out a revolver, but he saw at a glance that there was no occasion for further violence.

"Good work, Amby," he growled. "Great Scott! I hope you haven't killed him."

CHAPTER VI.

A QUARTET OF CROOKS.

Ambrose Floyd, for this was the very man whom Nick had been seeking, replaced the slung shot in his pocket and removed his blue spectacles. That he had worn them when venturing such an assault, with the risk of a blow that might forever blind him, evinced his superior nerve and absolute confidence.

"Killed him!" he sneered bitterly, with a voice as cold and hard as steel. "No such good luck, Phil. He's not so easily bumped off, this dick."

"You know him?" questioned Philbrick.

"To my cost—the devil take him!"

"Who?".

"Nick Carter."

'Carter—great guns!" cried Philbrick. "I thought he went to New York."

Instead of immediately replying, Floyd reached down and tore the disguise from the face of the fallen detective.

"See for yourself," he said, just as the two other confederates hurriedly entered. "He went no farther than the boat. That move was only a blind. He's out to get us. I suspected no less after what Chester told me about the Fall River job and the flight of the skirt. Thank God, we've got him, instead! That front door, Sampson?"

"It's all right," said the man called Tommy. "I've closed and locked it."

"Any observers, Jim?"

"Not an eye," declared the other demonstrator, whose name was James Dexter, tossing aside the towel with which he had aimed to deceive Nick as to his mission in the back room. "It was as safely done as if done in the night."

"Very good. Close this door."

"Nick Carter, eh?"

"None other."

"But how in thunder, Floyd, did you get wise?"

They stood gazing down at Nick, all four, like birds of prey above an ambushed and stricken victim. Though some of the color had left their faces, in none was there any sign of fear. They reflected only grim and pitiless satisfaction. It was enough for them, then, that he was down and out. That they now could guard against the future neither of them had a doubt.

"Get wise, eh?" Floyd echoed. "I got wise through hearing him question a man on the sidewalk. His inquiries smacked of suspicion, which in turn aroused my own."

"I see," Dexter nodded.

"Standing directly back of him, I was able to detect that he was in disguise, and—well, I knew him years ago. I knew him so well, hang him, that I could not mistake him to-day," Floyd added, in accents of bitterest animosity.

"That was when you lit the blue boys?" questioned Sampson."

"Yes. Wasn't it about time to set the signals working?" Floyd pointedly demanded.

"Perdition! I should say so."

"I warned you there was danger within when he entered, and then I hastened around to the back basement door. It was up to you to choke off intruders at the front door, Tommy, while Dexter joined me here in the back room. All that had been agreed upon in event of such an emergency."

"We delivered the goods, all right."

"True," Floyd approvingly nodded. "Half a dozen whispered words to Dexter told him the story, while your remark to Philbrick put him wise."

"Sure thing," cried Philbrick. "I wised up on the instant. To lure the infernal sleuth into this room—well, that was easy."

"It was equally easy to bump him into dreamland," said Floyd, with brutal satisfaction. "It did me a world of good to hand it to him. It relieved my rankling hatred a little. I've had it in for him for ten long years. We'll bump him off for keeps a little later."

"But what's to be done now? That's the question," growled Philbrick, glancing into the front store. "We're taking chances in letting him lie here, Amby, for all he's sleeping soundly."

"That's right, too," supplemented Dexter. "We'd better get a move on and put him out of sight."

"Where is the skirt, anyway?" put in Sampson apprehensively.

"Taunton," Floyd tersely informed him. "She jumped direct from Fall River, as planned, after getting the coin from Dakin. She still had the other fish to fry."

"After getting it—yes!" grumbled Sampson. "But that came cursed near being a slip-up."

"A miss is as good as a mile."

"Have you heard from her?"

"No," Floyd said shortly. "I have sent Chet Gilman to head her off."

"Head her off? What's that for?"

"Lest Carter may have phoned a warning to the Taunton postmaster. We must let our fish in that quarter go by the board. The job is too near like the one done in Fall River. I'll take no chances that Jess might be nailed."

"He'll be a good one who nails Jessie Gilman," said Dexter expressively. "She's as fly a skirt as ever stood in laces and lingerie. Even her husband has nothing on her, though Chester Gilman comes mighty near being the real article. Haven't you heard from him, either?"

"Not yet," said Floyd, shaking his head. "He hurried over here to tell me what had occurred in Fall River, after having watched Carter until he boarded the New York boat. I didn't half swallow that move, so I sent Chet to Taunton this morning to pull Jess out of the game up there. I feel easier, however, since nailing this infernal meddler," Floyd darkly added, with a glance at the unconscious detective.

"Easier is right," said Philbrick.

"He evidently decided to nose round in this direction, instead of Taunton, and the fact that he made that bluff move to board the New York boat, evidently thinking he might have been seen in Rudd's office and afterward watched, shows that he suspects us and our game and is after our pelts. I've more than half suspected the Washington authorities might turn to him for aid, they have been playing such a still game."

"They may have done so," Sampson suggested.

"Possibly."

"And Carter may have some of his assistants on the case."

"I don't think so," Floyd quickly objected. "Gilman is sure that Carter got his first inkling about us in Rudd's office."

"Where Chet knocked out the clerk?"

"Of course. That being the case, and I think he's right, Carter cannot have had time to ring in any of his assistants."

"There's something in that," Sampson allowed.

"He has merely dipped into the case personally to see what he could learn, and hoping to nail us," Floyd added. "We'll block that all right, now that we've got him under our heel. We'll put him away, clean up here to-morrow, as planned, and then make tracks for Kentucky. I have it all doped out."

The significance of all this would have been perfectly plain to Nick, if he could have heard what was said above his prostrate form. He was in the depths of utter oblivion, however, though he afterward discovered with what keen foresight he had adopted the precautions taken in Fall River and planned the work that had followed.

"We'd better get a move on, then, and dispose of him," Dexter repeated.

Floyd now acquiesced, yet said, with characteristic assurance:

"There's time enough, but as well now as later. Make him fast and take him into the basement. We'll shift him after dark to the crib in Second Street. It has an earth cellar which may not be disturbed for years after we quit the place. That will serve. We'll put him to bed with a shovel."

CHAPTER VII,

PATSY ON THE SPOT.

Patsy Garvan's search in Taunton that morning proved futile. A round of the hotels, a careful inspection of each register, a few discreet inquiries in each house, a furtive study of such guests as were visible—all proved entirely vain. One o'clock found Patsy only negatively wiser than when he arrived in Taunton.

"There's nothing doing in this burg," he said to himself, after a hurried lunch. "That's a copper-riveted cinch, if ever there was one. I'll hike over to Attleboro and see how that will pan out."

Attleboro panned out no better than Taunton, however, and Patsy Garvan returned to the latter city with feelings of mingled impatience and disgust over his failure to find any trace of Ambrose Floyd.

"I'm on the wrong scent, that's a sure thing," he said to himself, little dreaming how soon he was to enjoy a decided mental change. "If Amby Floyd, as he's called, has been quartered in any hotel in these parts, he took mighty good care not to register. I'll make one more call at the City Hotel, however, in case Nick or Chick has wired me. It's dead open and shut that I have nothing to wire them."

It was after four o'clock when Patsy entered the hotel, where he learned that no communication of any kind was awaiting him. He turned to depart, thinking he would take the next train and join Nick in New Bedford, as had been agreed upon under the existing conditions.

As he was leaving the hotel, however, Patsy caught sight of a woman in an adjoining corridor, whose occupation caused him to wonder, and then to watch her.

She was a handsome brunette in the twenties, fashionably clad in street attire. Patsy saw only her profile at that time, while she stood talking earnestly to a darky employed in the hotel, so earnestly, in fact, as to arouse Patsy's curiosity.

Presently, after listening attentively, the darky accepted a bank note which the woman slipped into his hand. At the same time he nodded understandingly, as if consenting to comply with something the woman required. The negro evidently was a porter, or outside servant, for he wore a livery and a cap bearing the name of the hotel in gilt letters.

"By Jove, I think I've seen that woman before," thought Patsy. "If she would lift her veil, or turn this way, I might make sure about it. It's barely possible that she is the one who figured in——"

Patsy's train of thought, then directed upon the Fall River swindle, ended abruptly.

The negro had turned and was entering the office, while the woman passed out of Patsy's view in the direction of the street door.

"Say, Baldy, I'm going out about ten minutes," said the darky, addressing the hotel clerk, a bald-headed man named Baldwin. It's an open question for which reason the darky applied the nickname. "I'll show up again shortly."

"Where are you going, Mose?" Baldwin demanded. "It's nearly time for the four-twenty-eight train."

"I'll be back before that time," Mose hurriedly answered. "Mrs. Vandyke, that swell guest who arrived from Lenox last night, has a use for me."

"Ah, that's different. Go ahead, Mose, in that case."

"I'm gone, not going," returned the darky, as he disappeared through the street door.

Patsy overheard the foregoing, and it increased his suspicions, though they were not then of a very definite character. He did not just see how Mrs. Vandyke, so-called, could have any use for Mose, a colored man, that fitted in with his mission in Taunton.

Patsy followed the darky, nevertheless, and he soon saw that Mose was following the woman. She evidently had not selected to walk the street in company with him.

Patsy shadowed both.

The woman made a bee line for the post office.

Mose followed her into the building.

"Holy smoke!" Patsy mentally exclaimed. "I'm wise, now, all right. I've got nearly as keen eyes and as much insight, by Jove, as the chief himself. Mrs. Vandyke, eh? Not much! She's my quarry, all right, and one of the gang. She's going to cash a money order, mebbe two or three, and has bribed that darky to come here to identify her. The money-order clerk will fall for it, too, when he sees the darky's livery and is told that the woman's a guest in the hotel."

Patsy did not rely entirely upon these shrewd deductions, despite that he felt sure that he had hit the nail on the head. He stole into the post office, and to a point from which he could, without being seen, obtain a view of the money-order window.

The woman was then standing near it, holding two money orders in her gloved hands, and she had just beckoned the darky to approach.

Mose obeyed hurriedly, grinning and bowing, and saying something to the clerk, with whom he evidently was acquainted; and it afterward appeared that he, innocently assuming that this attractive guest of the hotel was entirely honorable, as well as generous with her tips, had not the slightest idea that he was assisting in defrauding the government out of nearly two hundred dollars.

The woman bowed and smiled and dismissed him, then turned again to the clerk, who at once proceeded to cash the two money orders, precisely as Patsy had foreseen.

Mose hurried out of the post office and back to the hotel, five dollars better off for the service rendered.

Patsy Garvan made no move to detain him. His gaze then was fixed upon the woman, while she stowed away the stolen money in a leather bag. She had removed one glove and lifted her veil, more easily to sign the two orders. Patsy then had recognized her.

"By Jove, I'll eat my hat if she isn't Jessie Gilman, the wife of Chet Gilman, the East Side gangster and confidence man," he said to himself. "I've seen her only once before, but I'm blessed if I wouldn't swear to her identity. The wind has shifted, at all events, and it should be soft walking to trail her to cover. She'll not return to that hotel. She'll just about cut loose for the headquarters of the gang, now that she has landed the green goods. That's enough for me at this stage of the game. I'll provide her with an escort, all right."

Patsy's identification was entirely correct, as will presently appear, as well as why Gilman had failed to head off this felony on the part of his wife, contrary to what Ambrose Floyd that morning had predicted.

As Patsy anticipated, moreover, Jessie Gilman did not return to the hotel. She at once hastened to the railway station and boarded a train for New Bedford.

Patsy followed her into one of the cars, where the woman almost immediately learned that she had taken the wrong one, that only two rear cars then detached from the train went to New Bedford. Jessie hastened out again, therefore, with Patsy after her, and sought the right car.

A man in a bootblack's chair on the station platform had observed them. He noticed the mistake both had made, and the celerity with which Patsy had followed the woman. He sprang down from the chair and entered a near waiting room, from which he quickly emerged in disguise, and also boarded the car.

It was early evening when the train arrived at the Purchase Street station, New Bedford. It had been dark for more than an hour. It was one of those misty, drizzly nights which at certain seasons are so frequent on the south shore of the old Bay State. Pedestrians were carrying umbrellas. The pavements were wet and slippery. Street lamps burned with a sallow glow through the gray mist.

Jessie Gilman entered a waiting trolley car and took the seat in one corner.

Patsy Garvan boarded the car, but remained on the rear platform.

The woman rode to Union Street, all the while with her veil drawn down and her head bowed, seeking to avoid observation.

Patsy was more than pleased with the turn of affairs and the course Jess Gilman had shaped. He felt reasonably sure that Nick still was in New Bedford. He reasoned, moreover, that he must have made some discovery that would detain him there, and that he could find him at the hotel agreed upon.

"I'll trail this jade to cover, and then notify him," Patsy was saying to himself when the car approached Union Street. "It then will be child's play to take in the entire gang. It's dollars to fried rings that this was the woman who turned the trick in Fall River, and the evidence I have against her will serve to——"

Patsy's thoughts digressed abruptly, for Jessie Gilman had signaled the conductor, and was rising to leave the car. Patsy dropped off at once, and was ready to pick her up when she alighted.

Jess hurried down Union Street to Second, and then turned south, walking rapidly through the misty night, and presently approaching an inferior wooden dwelling which, viewed from in front, appeared to be shrouded in darkness.

It was located in one of the low and oldest quarters of the city, nearly down to the water front, with a picket fence dividing it from the street. The entrance was in a narrow side yard, into which Jess quickly turned her steps, and opened the door with a key.

She had disappeared into the house when Patsy sauntered by the gate and glanced into the narrow yard. He walked on some twenty paces, sizing up the gloomy house and its inferior surroundings, and then he retraced his steps and stole into the yard.

"I'll have a look at the back windows," he said to himself. "I may be able to learn who is here and what's doing. The front is as dark as a pocket. I'll wager, nevertheless, that Jess Gilman is not living alone here."

Patsy's conviction was speedily confirmed. A few steps brought him to an area back of the house, when two lighted windows of a basement met his cautious gaze. The curtains were closely drawn, however, and he crept nearer to try to peer between one of them and the casing, or to hear what might be said within.

Between the two windows was a back door, with a single, low wooden step, indiscernible in the darkness.

Patsy crept to the nearer window. The sound of voices from within could be faintly heard. The glow from the illuminated curtain fell upon his face. He crouched noiselessly on the damp earth, listening intently, but he heard only—sudden, quick steps from behind.

A man who had moved with the stealth of a leopard through the side yard leaped around the corner of the house. Another bound brought him within reach of the detective, just as Patsy swung round and sprang to his feet, warding off a blow aimed at his head with a sandbag.

A snarl of mingled disappointment and rage broke from his assailant, while Patsy gasped involuntarily, as the faint light fell upon the other's face.

"Chet Gilman—by thunder!" murmured the young detective.

The weapon rose again, and Gilman leaped upon him.

Patsy met him halfway, seizing his uplifted arm, and reaching for his revolver. He was forced back by the violent assault. One foot slipped in the damp earth and struck the low doorstep.

It tripped him, throwing him backward, still fiercely grappling with Gilman, and both men fell with a terrific bang against the back door. The crash of a breaking panel was followed by threatening cries from within.

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE TO FACE.

"Without any exception, Carter, I suppose I'm the happiest man in North America to-night."

The speaker was Ambrose Floyd.

He was seated in the back-basement room of the house in Second Street. It evidently had been intended for a laundry, for three set tubs flanked one of the walls. It then was furnished with a bare table, standing in the middle of the room, and with several cheap wooden chairs.

Nick Carter occupied one of them, securely bound hand and foot, as well as tied to the legs and back of it.

Ambrose Floyd was seated on another, directly opposite the powerless detective.

Tipped back against one of the walls, mute observers for the most part of the scene then enacting, sat Philbrick, Sampson, and Dexter, gazing with ominous frowns at Nick's clean-cut, sternly impassive face.

An oil lamp on a shelf lighted the dismal surroundings, and the open door of a basement entry and a narrow stairway leading to the floor above.

Nick Carter never knew just how he had been transferred from the store in Purchase Street to his present quarters, where he had found himself when he revived less than an hour before. That he was up against a serious situation, one that threatened life itself, no sane man could have doubted. For the light in Floyd's eyes spelled murder, while his cold, merciless voice sounded only the more deadly because of its calmness.

Nick Carter appeared, however, to be entirely oblivious to his peril. He gazed across the table at Floyd, and answered coldly:

"You are happy, I suppose, because you have got me."

"Yes."

"Take care that you make the most of it, then, or I may turn the tables."

Floyd drew forward in his chair.

"I shall—I shall make the most of it," he said, with vicious emphasis. "I have been looking forward to it, hoping and praying for it, for ten long years."

"In prison," put in Nick curtly.

"Yes. Where you put me!"

"I'll put you there again sooner or later."

"Never! Others may do so, but you—never!"

"Wait and see," said Nick shortly. "Prison is the place for such fellows as you, Floyd. You are like birds of prey, of no earthly use, who produce nothing but misery and suffering, and who live upon the labor and industry of others. Prison is the place for you."

"Better that than the place we'll provide for you," Floyd retorted, with a sneer. "What started you after me again, anyway?"

"It's my business to look after professional crooks."

"Are you employed by the government?"

"If not, I soon shall be," said Nick evasively.

"But you are not, Carter, and I know it," Floyd forcibly asserted.

"Why, then, did you inquire?"

"It was only by chance that you stumbled upon us and discovered the game we are playing. You got wise to it in Rudd's office. You were seen when you watched and followed him upstairs. You were seen going to the post office a little later. Until then, Carter, you knew nothing about our game."

Nick saw that Floyd was far from sure of it, and that he was aiming to evoke some admission, or response, that would betray just what Nick already had learned and done, as well as whether others were at work with him on the case. It seems needless to add that the detective did not enlighten him.

"Have it as you like," he replied indifferently. "How you size it up, Floyd, matters very little to me."

"I have it doped out all right," Floyd retorted, with sinister assurance. "You've got nothing on us that we're not wise to."

"Let it go at that, then."

"What led you to suspect the store in Purchase Street?"

Nick laughed derisively.

"What are you looking for, Floyd?" he demanded. "Information enabling you to guard against like lameness in the future?"

"How were we lame?"

"Oh, I don't mind telling you," said Nick, not averse to prolonging the conversation, in that it deferred the threatening designs of the gang and gave him a bare possibility of devising some way of escape.

"Buy a substantial sign for your window next time, Floyd, not a flimsy pasteboard affair denoting that your business is only temporary," Nick went on. "Don't back your window with a heavy curtain, excluding the light from a store which at best is much too poorly lighted. That looks as if one had something to hide, instead of something to display. Don't lumber it with a lot of empty boxes, moreover, when pretending they contain the goods you are advertising. One needs only to move a box to learn that it is empty. Fill them with something, Floyd, if boxes are essential."

"Humph!" Floyd ejaculated, frowning. "So that is why you suspected us?"

"Those are some of the reasons."

"Are there others?"

"Don't be so inquisitive. I'm not an information bureau."

"Is that so?" Floyd spoke with a sneer. "We shall get along nicely, Carter, if left in ignorance of what information you possess. Make no mistake about that."

"I'll take your word for it," Nick retorted.

"I'll be hanged if I'm so sure of it, Amby," declared Dexter, who had been moving restlessly on his chair while listening to the foregoing. "We'd better force him to come across with the goods. I'm not sure that you have doped out the situation correctly."

"What do you mean?" Floyd demanded, swinging around in his chair.

"I mean what I say. It's nearly eight o'clock. What has become of the skirt? Why hasn't Gilman showed up? It ought not to have taken him all day to pull her out of that Taunton job."

"That's right, too," Philbrick put in, with a growl. "A couple of hours ought to have turned the trick. Why aren't they here?"

"As like as not, Amby, both have been nailed," added Dexter. "This dick may have phoned a warning, after all, just as you feared. They ought to be here, if not! That's a sure thing."

Floyd turned again with lowering gaze at the detective.

Nick had been listening with more than cursory interest, and with increasing satisfaction. He knew very well that the rascals must refer to the couple who had committed the swindle in Fall River, and who evidently had gone to Taunton to perpetrate another.

The details of their design were not material to Nick at that time. It was enough for him that the expected couple were mysteriously absent. He at once felt sure that Patsy had got in his work, that he in some way would ferret out this headquarters of the gang, and that assistance would soon be forthcoming. This alone was enough to dispel Nick's misgivings as to the outcome of his threatening situation.

"We'd better make him put us wise," cried Philbrick, with an ugly snarl. "This being in the dark don't suit me worth a cent. Force the truth out of him—that's my advice."

"Go ahead," Nick coolly suggested. "You'll find that may be easily done—perhaps!"

"See here, Carter!" Floyd began to threaten. "We'll take that out of you. Unless you consent to tell us——"

He stopped short, interrupted by a sound from the floor above, while Sampson and Dexter sprang apprehensively to their feet.

A key had been thrust into a lock. The house door closed with a bang. In another moment quick footsteps sounded on the entry stairs, with the rustle of skirts and the low laugh of a woman.

"By thunder! here she comes," cried Dexter, in tones of immediate relief.

"It's Jess, all right," shouted Sampson exultantly. "Things may not be as dark as they look."

He had hurried to the door just as Jess Gilman appeared on the threshold, and while he spoke he eagerly drew her into the room.

Nick Carter felt no momentary twinge of disappointment because of her arrival. As quick as a flash, he reasoned that Patsy Garvan must have discovered her if she had been playing any game in Taunton, and he knew what the result in that case should be.

CHAPTER IX.

PARTNERS IN PERIL.

Nick Carter recognized Jessie Gilman, moreover, the moment she entered the room. He had known her crook husband for years, and it was evident on the instant that Jess also recognized him.

For she drew back with a look of surprise, with a quick paleness settling in her cheeks, while she gazed apprehensively at Floyd.

"Great Scott!" she exclaimed. "What's this mean?"

"Don't you know?" Floyd demanded.

"Certainly not. How could I know?"

"Haven't you seen Chet?"

"Seen him when?"

"To-day."

"Not hide nor hair of him," Jess declared, throwing off her street garments. "I haven't seen him since we parted in——"

She hesitated, and Floyd quickly said:

"You needn't be mealy-mouthed. This dick will never get a chance to make use of what he sees and hears. Do you know him?"

"Certainly I know him," snapped the woman, frowning.

"Yes, and I know you," Nick pointedly remarked. "I know no good of you, either."

"Is that so?" Jess retorted, with a sneer. "Well, you paste what you know in your hat. Little good it will do you, and little I care."

"Don't bank too strong on that," Nick replied sternly. "Wait and see."

"I'd sooner wait than see," Jess snapped back at him disdainfully. "How'd you get him, Amby? What's happened?"

It was now apparent to all that she knew nothing about what had occurred in Fall River after she had swindled Postmaster Dakin and fled to Taunton, and Floyd, disregarding Nick's presence, quickly told her what had transpired.

"I feared he might warn the Taunton office," he added, with a toss of his head in the direction of the detective. "So I sent Chet after you this morning to pull you out of the game."

"Pull me out of it, eh?" Jess cried, with a derisive laugh. "That would have been a fat move. I've not seen him."

"Chet?"

"Yes."

"Where were you?"

"Lying low in the hotel," Jess glibly explained. "I registered as Mrs. Vandyke and posed as a wealthy woman from Lenox. I handed that out in order to woolly-eye a nigger porter a little later, who fell for a story I told him—and for a five-dollar note."

"How was that?" questioned Floyd, with interest, while the others grinned and listened.

"How was it!" echoed Jess. "Why, I thought I'd better wait till late in the afternoon before I turned the trick. That served to head off an exposure before to-morrow, at least."

"Sure!" said Floyd.

"I wouldn't take any chance in the street, so I remained in my room until after four o'clock," she went on. "That's probably why Chet failed to locate me. I hadn't told him what name I would take."

"I see," Floyd put in again.

"I hung round until after four, and then I cornered the nigger in a corridor," Jess continued to explain. "I told him I had a small money order to cash, and that, seeing as how I was a stranger, he could do me a favor by going to the post office and telling the clerk I was a guest at the hotel."

"Good for you, Jess," Floyd declared, laughing.

"Oh, he fell for it, all right," she nodded. "I slipped him a five case, too, and that settled it. He handed it to the money-order clerk just as I had directed, that I was a guest of the house, and that he knew me to be all right."

"And the clerk?"

"Oh, he came across with the long green," Jess cried, with a laugh. "He forked it over without a whisper. Here 'tis! Nearly two hundred bucks! Pull me out of the game, eh? That would, indeed, have been a fat move."

She opened her leather bag while speaking, with manifest pride in her evil doings, and exultantly dumped upon the table the quantity of loose bank notes of which she had so craftily robbed the Taunton post office.

Floyd laughed loudly, a laugh in which his confederates heartily joined, while the woman gazed at Nick's stern face with a stare of mingled triumph and contempt.

"Good work, Jess," Floyd cried approvingly. "One could not do better. This certainly relieves my fears concerning what this infernal meddler might have done."

"I've killed two birds with one stone, then, Amby."

"You sure have, Jess."

"But where is Chet?" asked Dexter, puzzled. "Why hasn't he showed up?"

"That's right, too," supplemented Sampson. "What's keeping him? He ought to be here, all right, unless—— Perdition! what's that?"

It was a bang on the outer door and the crash of a breaking panel, when Patsy Garvan and the missing Gilman fell against it and nearly broke it from its hinges.

There could be no mistaking the meaning of such sounds, nor the snarls and growls for help that immediately followed them. On the instant, with a fierce oath on his lips, Floyd leaped to his feet and drew a revolver, then rushed like a madman to open the back door of the house, closely followed by his three scowling male confederates.

The scene that met their gaze was strictly in line with what Ambrose Floyd had immediately suspected. Patsy Garvan and Chet Gilman were prostrate on the ground, each gripping the other and fighting like wild cats, though Patsy already had wormed himself on top, and was in a fair way to have speedily ended the combat.

The arrival of four others upon the scene, however, ended Patsy's hope of mastering the situation. Floyd bounded out and quickly clapped his revolver to the detective's head.

"Break away!" he cried, through his teeth. "Let go your hold, or I'll plug a bullet through you. Hang onto his legs, Chet. I've got this end of the cursed bearcat!"

Patsy had continued fighting tooth and nail, until he felt the chill muzzle of the gun touch his head, and fierce hands gripping his throat and arms, those of Philbrick, Dexter, and Sampson. Patsy then decided that discretion was wisdom, at least, and he ceased struggling and suffered the rascals to yank him to his feet.

Dexter quickly reached under their captive's coat and got his revolver, thrusting it into his own pocket, while Gilman scrambled up, white and panting, and gasped:

"Don't let him bolt. Brain the whelp, if necessary."

"We've got him, all right," growled Philbrick. "He'll move faster than cold lead if he gives us the slip."

"Force him into the house."

"Who is he? Where did you run foul of him?" Floyd hurriedly questioned, while Patsy was roughly crowded toward the door and into the basement entry.

"I was getting my boots blacked in the Taunton station, and piped him following Jess into the train," Gilman quickly explained. "I hadn't been able to locate her up to that time. I supposed she had returned without attempting to do the job. I was waiting for the train when I saw that whelp on her heels."

"He shadowed her here?"

"That's what, with me after both of them."

"Do you know him?"

"I can guess."

"One of Carter's assistants?"

"As sure as death and taxes, Amby."

"Well, that's all right," chuckled Floyd, quite gleefully. "We've got Carter himself, as well, and can wipe out the pair of them."

"Got Carter!" Gilman gasped, staring. "The devil you say!"

"I'd sooner have him, Chet, than the devil," Floyd declared. "He's much more to be feared. I'll tell you how we got him a little later. Let's first make sure of the other."

Patsy Garvan already had been forced into the basement room, where he saw at once that Nick also had been somehow caught in the toils. As was customary under such circumstances, however, not a word passed between them, nor the slightest sign of recognition, though a covert expression in Nick's eyes cautioned Patsy to disclose nothing.

Dexter and Philbrick were binding him hand and foot when Floyd entered with Gilman, and Patsy merely growled resentfully:

"Go easy with those cords, blast you! Do you want to saw my wrists off?"

"You're dead lucky it's not your head," snapped Philbrick. "It'll be that later."

"It's mighty likely to be," added Floyd, snatching the disguise from Patsy's face. "Ah! this is what I suspected. Young Garvan, eh? So you're not alone on the case, Carter, as I thought. How many more are there?"

"If I were to tell you, Floyd, you would not believe me," Nick dryly answered. "If you want further information, you had better seek it elsewhere. You will learn nothing from me, nor from Patsy."

"Won't I? You wait and see."

Floyd uttered the threat with vicious asperity, then swung round to Gilman and drew him into the entry. There they were presently joined by the others, all the while within view of their captives, and for nearly half an hour a whispered discussion followed, in tones too low to reach the detectives' ears.

The conclusions at which the rascals arrived were tersely set forth by Floyd, as follows:

"We've got to wipe them out and then light out ourselves. It's a cinch that they know nothing about our scheme for to-morrow, or Carter would not have been nosing around here after information. We'll put it through as planned, therefore, and take a chance of getting away with the coin. You tackle the bank in the morning, Dexter, as soon as it opens. You keep an eye on the post office, Sampson, and you on the Purchase Street store, Philbrick. If you discover any spies, head Dexter off and prevent his being nailed. If not, all hands join me here after getting the coin. I'll hire that big seven-seater again and we'll motor to Providence, where we'll scatter for a time. We ought to get away easily after—disposing of these two dicks!"

CHAPTER X.

CHICK DOES A HOLDUP.

Chick Carter was puzzled.

It was not, ordinarily, very easy to seriously puzzle Nick Carter's chief assistant. It required a problem of unusual character and complexity. Be that as it may, however, Chick certainly was puzzled that evening when, arriving in New Bedford soon after seven o'clock, he could find no trace of Nick, no sign of Patsy.

Chick's own mission in Brockton that day had proved futile. He had accomplished absolutely nothing, save in so far as his investigations went to show that the money-order crooks had not, as well as he then could learn, been operating in that city. Subsequent evidence brought to light, nevertheless, that numerous forged orders bearing the names and signatures of Western offices had been cashed three days before.

As had been agreed upon, therefore, Chick then repaired to New Bedford, expecting to find Nick and Patsy at the leading hotel, having received no wire from either of them.

It was after seven o'clock when he alighted from a trolley car and entered the hotel, where he immediately looked around for Nick, then consulted the register. It did not bear the fictitious name which Nick had adopted. The letter rack contained no missive addressed to Chick in the name he had assumed. In no part of the house could he find any trace of his two associates on the case.

"By Jove, this is strange," he said to himself, sauntering out upon the steps and gazing up and down Purchase Street. "Nick ought to have been here during the day. He ought to be here now, in fact, as well as Patsy, since he was going to leave word for me in case Patsy wired him to Taunton. There certainly is something wrong. Can any mishap have befallen him, or both of them? The wind seems to set from that quarter, for fair."

Chick was not long in concluding that there could be no other explanation of Nick's absence, nor was he then long in setting to work to find a clew to his whereabouts, or some trace of the gang responsible for his mysterious disappearance.

Chick began these investigations with a careful inspection of the registers in the several hotels. He went from one to another as fast as his feet would carry him through the misty night. His quest again proved vain. At none could he find any signature in a hand at all resembling that of Ambrose Floyd.

It afterward appeared that Floyd, instead of taking quarters in a hotel, had settled himself in a fashionable

County Street boarding house, pretending to have visited the city on business.

His five confederates had in the meantime discovered a cheaply furnished house in Second Street, which they had immediately rented, in spite of the fact that its inferior locality was not to their liking.

Chick Carter was still more perplexed, therefore, when he failed to find the evidence he was seeking. That failure alone further convinced him, nevertheless, that Nick must be in the city and up against trouble of some kind, in which Patsy might also be involved. He had no alternative but to wait until morning to resume his investigations, however, it being nearly midnight when he completed his round of the hotels.

The morning dawned clear and pleasant. Soon after eight o'clock, carefully disguised, Chick left the hotel and visited the post office, where he had a private conference with the postmaster.

"My name is Carter, Mr. Dalton, and I'm looking for a gang of money-order crooks," said he, introducing himself and then briefly stating some of the circumstances. "What information can you give me?"

"You are not Nick Carter, are you?" Dalton inquired curiously, after hearing what Chick had imparted.

"No, I'm not Nick," Chick replied. "I am his chief assistant. I have a hunch that Nick himself is in trouble here."

"Dear me, is that so?"

"My time is valuable, therefore."

"Surely. But I know of no information that I can give you," Dalton assured him. "All money orders that we have cashed appear to be perfectly genuine."

Appearances are sometimes deceitful," said Chick. "Have there been any unusual circumstances?"

"Not that I know of," said Dalton, shaking his head. "I'll call in my money-order clerk. He is in closer touch with that department than I am. We'll hear what he can tell us."

"Bring him in on the quiet," said Chick. "It's barely possible that he is being watched."

"This will bring him," said the other, touching a push button on his desk. "It isn't unusual for him to confer with me at this hour."

"Very good," said Chick, nodding approvingly.

He had waited only a few moments when the clerk entered, a young man named Page, and the detective at once began to question him.

"There is only one circumstance, Mr. Carter, that seems to me might have a bearing on the case," Page said thoughtfully, after replying to several of Chick's inquiries.

"What is that?" questioned the latter.

"There were about a dozen money orders presented here through the Acushnet National Bank yesterday afternoon, and nearly as many the day before. They evidently had been placed in their bank deposit for collection by Riggs & Gray, who have an account with that bank."

"Do you know them?"

"Riggs & Gray?"

"Yes."

"Not well," said Page. "I know only that they claim to be the New England agents of a vacuum-cleaner concern in Chicago. They have been here about a month, I think, giving demonstrations in a store in Purchase Street."

Chick pricked up his ears suspiciously.

"Have they previously deposited any money orders?" he inquired.

"Yes, twice, but only two in each instance," Page replied. "That was about ten days ago. The orders went through all right, and must have been genuine."

"They may have been deposited only with a design to avert distrust when forged orders in larger quantities were presented," Chick quickly and rightly reasoned.

"Possibly."

"A dozen orders came through the bank yesterday, eh?"

"I think that was the number."

"All made payable to Riggs & Gray?"

"Yes."

"From what points did they come?"

"All from remote towns in New England. They are, I suppose, payments that have been made for vacuum cleaners. That is what I was told by one of the bank clerks."

"Unless I am much mistaken, gentlemen, that bank has been very cleverly buncoed," Chick declared a bit grimly. "Are there any of those money orders still in this office?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let me see them. I'll soon discover their true character."

Page hastened to comply after receiving a nod of approval from Dalton, and Chick soon had the suspected money orders under inspection.

One glance, however, was enough to convince him that he had struck the right trail. The writing on all of them bore more or less resemblance to that on the forged orders cashed in Fall River the previous days—the writing of Ambrose Floyd.

Chick did not delay his departure. He lingered only to caution his companions against taking any immediate steps in the matter, or betraying any indications of distrust, and he then hastened up to Purchase Street and had a look at the store occupied by Riggs & Gray.

The store was closed that morning. The curtained window presented a deserted appearance. The place looked as if the birds already had flown.

Chick merely sauntered by on the opposite side. He reasoned that the gang, if his other suspicions were correct, might have a spy watching the store, in order to learn whether further investigations were being made.

Going even a step farther with his precautions, Chick returned to the hotel and changed his disguise. Ten minutes later he entered the Acushnet National Bank, scarce five minutes after its doors were opened for business.

Chick arrived there, as it happened, in the very nick of time.

James Dexter was at that moment at the paying teller's window, presenting the check of his fictitious firm for twelve hundred dollars.

"I'd like it in medium bills, fifties and twenties," he was saying, with a suave smile. "I have an invoice of vacuum cleaners to pay for in Boston, as well as several smaller accounts. Doing business with numerous express companies, as well as many strangers, I find the cash more acceptable to them than a check."

"Very well, Mr. Riggs," said the paying teller. "I can accommodate you, all right."

"Thank you very much," Dexter returned, still smiling. "We are building up a very good business with our cleaners."

"Is that so?"

"Very good indeed. We hope to have a big deposit here one of these days."

"Well, well, I hope so, too, I'm sure," said the teller.

Chick Carter overheard the foregoing brief colloquy—and he did not wait to hear more. The mention of Riggs' name led him to instantly suspect the game that was being played. He could see nothing satisfactory in arresting Dexter then and there, and he at once decided to track him to whatever point at which he should rejoin his confederates, thus enabling him to secure the entire gang.

Chick had stepped to the cashier's window and made a casual inquiry, merely to cover his entrance and immediate departure, and he now left the bank and walked briskly up the street—but not so far as to lose sight of the bank door.

Dexter walked out very complacently a few moments later, carrying a leather bag filled with the cash, and he at once headed for Second Street.

Chick followed him on the opposite side, unobserved among other pedestrians.

Five minutes brought both to the corner of the street they were seeking, upon turning which Chick discovered a huge automobile at a house some thirty yards away. It contained five persons, one woman among them, and a quick change in their facial expressions when they saw Dexter approaching at once led the detective to guess the truth.

"By Jove, it's a case of bolt!" he muttered. "They are going to make a quick get-away—or think they are! They are the gang, all right. We'll see what I can do against the gang."

Chick already had crossed the street, and he then was only about thirty feet behind Dexter. He was whistling a popular air while he walked, and appeared to have no interest in the latter nor in the automobile.

Dexter walked briskly to the car, the door of which Floyd was holding open.

"It's all right, Amby," cried the former. "I've gathered it in."

"Tumble in yourself, then!" cried Floyd; then to Philbrick, at the wheel: "Let her go, Phil, and go lively. We'll fly south, with the robins."

Dexter had sprung to a seat in the tonneau.

Philbrick reached for the clutch lever.

Chick Carter had arrived at a point directly in line with the hood of the car. Swerving quickly, he stopped short, and said, with ominous quietude:

"Hold on, my man! Don't touch that lever!"

"Don't what?" Philbrick snarled, staring. "What's to prevent?"

"These!" Chick whipped out a pair of revolvers and covered the entire gang. "Now, don't get gay, any of you, or there'll be an undertaker needed. I'm one of the Carters, and I'm here for business. Up with your hands, you fellow at the wheel, and be quick about it! I don't like the look in your eye."

The last came with a snap that sent Philbrick's hands into the air.

Jess Gilman was near fainting, and Floyd's pasty face had lost its last vestige of color. Gilman undertook to protest, but Chick cut him short with:

"You close your trap, Chet! I know you, and your presence here does settle it. I'll shoot the first person who moves foot or finger. This holdup, you rascals, is going to be a success."

It proved to be one, indeed. Two young men who were approaching hastened to Chick's assistance, one of whom immediately summoned the police. The car and its occupants were quickly taken to the station, and precisely ten minutes after the holdup all six of the gang were behind bolts and bars.

In the meantime, Chick had entered the Second Street house, where he found both Nick and Patsy confined in the cellar, bound hand and foot. In view of the uncertain circumstances, though Floyd had advocated the killing of both, the others of the gang would not risk an arrest for murder.

One and all of them were convicted of their crimes in the Federal court a month later, each receiving a term of years in the State prison. Nick was present when the sentence was pronounced.

Ambrose Floyd laughed aloud when he heard it.

Nick Carter wondered why—and he afterward learned.

THE END.

Why Ambrose Floyd laughed when his sentence was pronounced is disclosed in the story that will be found in the next issue of this weekly, No. 80, out March 21st. It is entitled "The Unknown Dead; or, Nick Carter and the English Crooks." The great detective thought his work and that of his assistants, in subduing Floyd for some time to come, had been successful, but through no fault of theirs the detectives again had to take to the trail for the clever rogue.

A CORK FACTORY.

A cork factory is an odd place. Scarcely a sound comes from the building where the industry is carried on. Noiseless machinery whirls with great rapidity; the only sound heard is that of escaping steam. Cork is soft and elastic, as everybody knows, and is the bark of a species of oak, which grows abundantly in Portugal, Italy, and Spain; principally in Spain. The trees grow to a prodigious size, and live to the ripe old age of one hundred and fifty years. At fifteen they begin to bear and continue to furnish new crops of bark every five years.

The harvesting occurs in the early spring. Incisions are made around the trees, and the bark is stripped off. It is then boiled to take out the sap, after which it passes through the pressing process. When dry, it is cut, scraped, trimmed, and put up in bales like cotton, for shipment.

At the factories it is placed in a square box, and steamed to soften it, so that it can be easily worked. Then it goes to the saw, and is cut into long strips.

From the saw the strips go to the punching machine. From a strip of bark a trifle over a foot long, only a dozen corks can be made, and half of the material is lost. But the waste does not end here. Even the cut corks have to be sorted, and a great number are rejected.

So that is one of the characteristic features of the manufacture of cork. Within the last few years, however, uses have been found for these scraps, which have considerably lessened the manufacturer's loss.

After being punched into circular form the corks go to the tapering machine, where their final preparation comes.

This is by far the most interesting part of this interesting industry. The corks are put into an iron hand, which conveys them to an imaginary mouth, when up comes the knife, and the shavings fly. The finished cork then drops out of place to make room for another. The capacity of the machine is about one hundred gross per day.

Before uses were discovered for the waste, some hundreds of tons were burned up every month, and thousands of dollars were lost in this way. Things are different now, however. All the waste is made into life preservers, cork jackets, cork-sprinkled paper, in which glass is placed, and linoleum. This pulverized stuff is also extensively used to pack Malaga grapes in, being handy, safe, and light. Bed mattresses and yacht cushions are also made of the shavings.

The Chief Inspector's Best Man.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Joseph Barnard, a lawyer, is found dead in the library of his home in Riverlawn Park, near Boston. A bullet from a revolver had caused his death, which, it is declared, could not have been self-inflicted. The revolver is found near the body. A stone, which had evidently been dislodged from a ring which Barnard wore during the lawyer's fight for life, is found on the floor of the library by Detective Keene, who is assisting Inspector Watts in his investigation of the case. Barnard had been last seen by his two sons early in the evening preceding the morning when the body was found, when with their cousin, Sybil Howard, they had gone out to a local entertainment. Miss Howard had returned home that night escorted by George Slocum, who lived next door.

While an investigation is taking place in the library of the Barnard home, Detective Keene, who is doing a little independent investigating outside of the room, finds Miss Howard eavesdropping. When questioned as to motives, the girl says she was impelled only by curiosity. This answer seems to satisfy Keene, and he returns to the library. The girl sees a young man emerging from the woods near the house, and a look of triumph lights her face; but she does not know the cunning of the detective.

CHAPTER IV.

A CONVERSATION OVERHEARD.

Detective Keene found Chief Inspector Watts and his companions still examining the documents and papers which strewed the table in the fatal room. His absence had not covered more than eight or ten minutes, and his purpose in returning had been solely to disarm Sybil Howard of suspicion as to his immediate movements.

That the approach of the person she had seen was of serious significance, she herself had inadvertently betrayed, and Detective Keene realized that a speedy and unsuspected espionage upon what followed their meeting was now of paramount importance.

He covered his rëentrance to the library by saying quietly:

"I've found nothing as yet, chief. I think I'll take a turn about the grounds."

The chief looked up, vaguely wondering that he had come at all with such insignificant matter.

"Very well!" he growled curtly.

Evidently his own discoveries were not wholly to his liking.

Turning quickly, Keene softly opened the door and regained the hall. A tapping on the pane of a window caught his ear. It appeared to come from the direction of the front parlor.

With the silence and celerity of a cat, Keene returned to the rear room, stealing to the broad doorway between the two, and concealing himself between the wall and the voluminous folds of the heavy portière.

It was as he had suspected—Sybil Howard was tapping on the front window to attract the approaching man.

With every nerve on the qui vive Detective Keene awaited the outcome.

Presently the stranger's tread sounded on the veranda stairs. Then the screen door was opened, and he quickly appeared at the drawing-room entrance.

"Good heavens!" thought Keene, the instant he heard his voice. "It is George Slocum!"

Sybil, pale and excited, met him almost on the threshold, a grave, handsome young man of two-and-twenty.

"My dear Sybil!" he exclaimed. "Is this dreadful news true? Has your uncle indeed——"

But there she cut short his grieved and sympathetic words, impulsively seizing his arm and drawing him into the room.

"Hush!" she whispered vehemently, with a swift glance about. "First of all, George, hear me!"

"What do you mean?" he gasped amazedly.

She replied with a caution, haste, and impressive significance that combined to turn her hearer's startled amazement to manifest horror and dismay.

"Can't you guess what I mean?" she whispered wildly. "Have you forgotten last night? I've been watching madly for you all the morning, lest you should come here with some betrayal. Yet I dared not send you word—I dared not! But I have revealed nothing! Nothing at all! Nor will I—nor will I!"

"Merciful heavens!" gasped Slocum. "You do not think that——"

"Hush! Not too loud! I do not think at all—I know!"

"Sybil——"

"This—oh, George, dear, this is now a matter of life and death! Can't you see that it is?"

"You alarm me!'

"Oh, you will! You will when you know all the terrible circumstances! Yes, my uncle was murdered last evening! Everything points to the fact that some person——"

"But not whom you would have me think!" Slocum interrupted, in horrified accents. "My God! I could not believe him guilty of——"

But the excited girl could not suffer his demurring.

"It don't matter whether he is guilty or not!" she argued, with feverish vehemence. "Everything will indicate that he is! He would not be the first innocent person to suffer from circumstantial evidence! When you know all, when the details of the terrible crime are revealed to you, you will see them as I do, and think as I think!"

"My God! Is it possible?"

"Nerve yourself! steady yourself!' pleaded the girl, all the while exhibiting qualities of heart and mind rare indeed in one of her sex and years. "If any one should come your very look would betray you."

"You are right!" muttered Slocum, making a desperate effort to pull himself together. "I'll be calm—or will try to be! But this is a frightful shock. I cannot believe what you imply."

"Wait till you know all."

Between the curtain and casing Keene saw George Slocum wipe from his brow the moisture that had gathered there in tiny drops; yet the dismay and agitation which at first had followed Sybil's mysterious words was now in part overcome.

He took her hands in both of his, an action that brought a quick glow of affection to her cheeks and eyes, and asked hoarsely:

"Is the evidence indeed so conclusive?"

"Frightfully so!"

"Yet I cannot believe——"

"Neither believe nor disbelieve!" protested Sybil, with pleading eyes upturned to his. "Put it out of your mind, George! It is not for us to pass judgment. There is but one course for us to follow."

"And that?"

"We must keep the secret—rigidly! sacredly! eternally! He will not betray himself, George, never fear that! And, God helping us, we must not betray him! We must keep the secret!"

"And you will do this?" asked Slocum, with his quivering lips betraying the sudden swell of a tender emotion. "You will do this, Sybil?"

His fervor deepened the glow in her cheeks. She drew herself closer, with gaze meeting his, with eyes swimming in the light of a love surpassing reason even.

And under the roof of him who since childhood had sheltered her, while he lay still and cold in death, and justice sought in vain for his assassin, Sybil Howard gave this man her answer.

"Yes, I will do it, George!" she whispered, with passionate fervor. "I pledge myself to do it! The secret shall be safe with me! My lips shall be sealed forever!"

He looked down at her for a moment, then warmly pressed her hands.

"I must see you where there is no possibility of interruption," he said suddenly. "I must know of what this evidence consists. Take me to your room. Can't you take me to your room?"

"Yes, if you wish," assented Sybil quickly. "Come."

And Detective Keene suffered them to depart unmolested.

What use to have confronted them then and there? Their word was as good as his in a court at law, and if already they had bound themselves by so awful a compact, they already would be equal to making a rigid denial.

They must be driven to the wall, decided Keene, in some more crafty way.

"She loves him! She loves him madly!" he said to himself, as he stole back to the hall and out-of-doors.

"And I am by no means sure in my own mind—to what this love may have led her!"

CHAPTER V.

WARY CONFIDENCES.

"You found no evidence outside the house, Shed?"

"None at all, chief," replied Detective Keene.

The two were riding back to town in the early afternoon, their immediate examination of the circumstances having been completed, and the family left to the performance of the sad duties which follow such fatalities.

Further questioning of the several inmates of the house had served only to corroborate the statements made by young Ralph Barnard, which here need no rehearsal; and Keene had already imparted to Chief Inspector Watts his discoveries of the morning.

Yet this adept in criminal investigation had made no decisive move ere leaving the Barnard house.

"The ground under the library windows?" he resumed inquiringly.

"Is a gravel walk and offers nothing. Nor is there any evidence that the windows have been tampered with."

"You say you know this young man, Slocum?"

"Very well, indeed, chief! We were quite good friends when in Harvard together."

"I think you had better take this case, then, and follow the clew you have struck," said the chief thoughtfully. "Since this Howard girl and Slocum do not suspect your observations, they will not likely be alarmed into any immediate action."

"I think you are right."

"During the afternoon we will examine more closely the charred documents I have brought away, and develop some definite line on which to proceed. Did Captain Mason leave in advance of us?"

Detective Keene shook his head.

"I think not," he replied. "Did you leave him free to act in this matter?"

"Oh, I shall not stand in his way!" smiled Chief Watts indifferently. "Let him act, if he runs upon anything to warrant it."

And there was rather more implied in the chief's smile than his words alone conveyed. For in every police department, as indeed in every phase of human life, there always exists a spirit of competition and rivalry which, while it may never be permitted to operate to a serious disadvantage, can never be entirely expunged. The subordinate is always eager to surpass the superior; and, in fact, perhaps it is better so, since a laudable ambition to excel is a healthy stimulant.

Detective Keene laughed softly.

"He seemed to take quite an earnest interest, and I rather think he has formd a theory of his own," said he. "However, chief, I'll bank upon your discernment and judgment against those of any man I happen to know."

To this Chief Inspector Watts returned no answer. His face had grown more grave. His lowered gaze was fixed upon a bundle laid on the seat opposite; as if, through its covering of brown paper, he would read with his searching eyes the true significance of its contents. He had taken up a train of thought which Detective Keene, even would not venture to interrupt, and which was not voluntarily broken until their motor drew up at the curbing before headquarters, whence it had started nearly five hours before.

Two days later the funeral of Lawyer Barnard occurred, and the mystery involving his death seemed, in so far as a curious public knew, as dark and insoluble as ever.

Both Detective Keene and Captain Mason of the police were present at the funeral, but neither appeared to have any special object, nor to acquire any particular information. On leaving, the detective volunteered to take Mason along in his carriage as far as the district police office, and their intercourse during the brief ride was significant.

"Well, Detective Keene," said Captain Mason abruptly, opening what proved to be somewhat of a verbal skirmish; "the victim of this tragedy is dead and will soon be buried; but the perpetrator of the crime is yet undiscovered. On the level, Keene, what do you make of the case?"

If this burly captain of police felt confident of pumping Keene, he was putting the saddle on the wrong horse, for the latter rarely gave himself away, as the saying goes.

And he is a shrewd man who, in competition, secures from others all the information he can, and in return imparts but little or none. It gives the recipient an advantage. And this was one of the clever characteristics of Detective Sheridan Keene.

"Well, on the level, Captain Mason—since you particularly desire it on the level!" he laughed oddly, yet meeting with genial frankness the other's steady scrutiny; "I am at present very much in the dark."

"Hasn't Chief Watts detailed you on the case?"

"Oh, yes! Yes, indeed!"

"I understand from him that he had. He has given me all his points in the affair."

"That so? Well, that's very like him," said Sheridan dryly. "With Inspector Watts there is ever but one object in view—that of serving justice in the safest, surest, and speediest way. What is the name of that young man I saw you talking with just before we came out—Slocum?"

"Yes, George Slocum," nodded Captain Mason, not discerning in Keene's innocent eye that a table had been turned. "He is the only son of Philip Slocum, the millionaire banker."

"Friend of the Barnard boys?"

"Very intimate, I understand."

"Grew up together, perhaps?"

"I think so. They live quite near, and the Barnard and Slocum estates adjoin."

"Is he married, this young Slocum?"

"No, he is not. I hear it rumored that he is soon to marry the daughter of Norton, the piano man. I believe the engagement was lately announced, yet Frank Barnard tells me he doubts if there is really anything in it."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"Slocum?"

"Yes."

"An honest young man, I think."

"Don't happen to know, do you, if at any time it has been thought likely that he would marry Miss Howard, who lives with the Barnards?" asked Detective Keene indifferently.

Captain Mason instantly pricked up his ears. He wondered what evidence Keene had discovered that prompted such a question.

"Not that I know of," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, for no reason in particular!" said Detective Keene carelessly. "I am carrying the case in mind, and naturally am looking on all sides for a motive for the crime. This Howard girl was the first to reach home the evening Barnard was shot," he added significantly.

"But surely you don't imagine she shot him!" exclaimed Mason involuntarily.

"I never imagine anything!" laughed the detective. "Either I know or I do not know! I sometimes suspect, but I never imagine. No, I don't suspect Sybil Howard—at least, not yet. Still," and his keen gray eyes came round to search those of the police captain, "there is no knowing what a jealous woman will do, and this Howard girl rather impresses me as being a Tartar. She is infernally handsome."

"I admit all that, but I don't believe that she had any hand in this affair!" said Captain Mason curtly. "Who benefits by the Barnard will? In that, possibly, one might find a motive for the crime."

"His sons are joint heirs. We have looked that up, and them as well. Though either might have been an accessory before the crime, neither of them committed it. Nor am I inclined to suspect them at all."

"Well, whom do you suspect? Anybody?"

"To tell the truth, Captain Mason," said Keene dubiously, "I can't say."

There was a gleam of doubt in Mason's eyes, and he rejoined rather sharply:

"Didn't Chief Watts take away the revolver with which the crime was committed? Don't he know it belonged to Barnard himself?"

"Well, now that you speak of it, I believe he does."

"You know he does, Detective Keene! And Ralph Barnard informed me that the old man usually kept it in his chamber, but for some reason had brought it down to the library."

"That seems to indicate that he feared he might have occasion to use it, or at least require it in self-defense," suggested Keene.

"Yes, I have thought of that! It suggests, too, that he was expecting some visitor that evening, despite that he made no mention of the fact to his family, even on finding that he was to be left alone in the house!" exclaimed Mason impulsively.

Keene ceased beating about the bush.

"Captain Mason," he said abruptly, "you have formed a theory!"

"Ah, do you really think so?" cried Mason, bridling.

"Better—I know so!" smiled Keene, in a quizzical way.

"And I presume you think you know even what it is!"

"Yes, I do, sir! You think Barnard had an appointment with some man that evening. Not a woman, sir, for he would not have required a revolver to have defended himself from a woman. The man already was a foe of Barnard, or the latter would not have anticipated an assault. You further think that the appointment was kept, and during the absence of the other persons from the house. You think that an altercation resulted between the two men, and that Barnard was assaulted and struck his assailant, and that the latter, in some way securing Barnard's revolver, shot him dead. This must have occurred so late in the evening that the criminal feared the immediate return of some of the family, for the ineffective way in which he fired the place betrayed his haste and excitement. He fled, closing the library door behind him, and leaving the room lighted. When the family returned and retired, it naturally was inferred that Barnard was still at work. Instead, he lay dead on the library floor, and the smoldering fire had burned out. Captain Mason, that is your theory!"

The latter laughed, but colored slightly.

"Keene, you have a long head!" he said slowly. "I don't mind admitting it—that is my theory!"

"And the question to be answered is, who was the visitor?"

"Precisely! Don't the lawyer's documents or papers suggest any person with whom he may have had business that evening?"

Detective Keene shook his head.

"They suggest many persons," he replied. "Unfortunately, many of the documents are considerably burned. In so far as I can determine from the charred remains, they consist largely of deeds, writs, with four or five mortgages, and one was evidently a will. The latter, however, is so nearly destroyed that I cannot determine even whose will it was. Only a small segment of it is left at all, but by part of a line here and there it appears to involve a considerable property."

"Is the date intact?"

"Not even the date. By the faded paper, however, it appears to be an old one."

"The signatures of the witnesses?"

"Gone in smoke! Nothing is left by which it can be positively identified."

"Could it not be traced at the probate court?"

"I fear not. Here we are at your station."

"Will you come in?"

"No, I thank you. I'll let the cab take me back to headquarters. Good day!"

"Good day!"

And Captain Mason nodded farewell rather grimly.

CHAPTER VI.

A CHASE IN THE DARK.

After the crime comes the pursuit—often that long, tedious, and frequently unavailing search made by these patient and persistent bloodhounds of the law, in an effort to avenge the dead and punish the transgressor.

An eye for an eye!

A tooth for a tooth!

A life for a life!

This is the law!

In the semidarkness of the early evening, two days subsequent to the burial of Joseph Barnard, a solitary man stole into the great park surrounding the dead man's dwelling and cautiously approached it from one side.

The man was Detective Keene.

His purpose was to secure, unbeknown to others of the house, a second interview with Sybil Howard.

The night was wholly clear. Fleeting clouds here and there obscured the stars, and a dismal wind sighed through the gloomy trees.

Doubtful how he might successfully attract Sybil from the house, providing he found her at home, Detective Keene skirted the damp lawn until opposite the dining room, which was lighted, and the side door.

From the latter, even while he stood watching and undecided, there suddenly emerged the figure of the girl he was seeking. But the manner of her egress, the care with which she softly closed the door, the dark garment in which she was clad, and the silent haste with which she stole away, at once indicated that she was departing on some definite and secret mission.

"So, so! my darling and defiant beauty!" said the detective to himself. "This also looks a bit suspicious; I will see what it portends, since our little interview can wait!"

And he prepared to cautiously follow her.

It did not prove an easy task, despite his experience as a shadow, for Sybil Howard, instead of turning to the street, shaped a course through the park and the woodland beyond. In the darkness this added to the difficulty, requiring the detective to maintain a close pursuit, and augmenting the danger of discovery by the rustle of leaves and breaking twigs.

It was a rough walk, and lonely; one no woman would have chosen save to avoid observation, and under stringent circumstances and serious mental excitement.

That Sybil Howard was thus actuated, Keene speedily decided, was betrayed in her walk, her nervous haste, and her manifest determination.

Before she had reached her destination the detective had guessed it.

"She is going to see George Slocum!" was his mental comment.

But in this he was wrong, despite that presently the lights in the banker's great wooden mansion came into view through the trees.

That Sybil Howard was expected was also betrayed in her movements. She at once approached the side door of the house, which was almost immediately opened for her; not by George Slocum—but by the banker himself!

By the light in the narrow entry Keene caught a glimpse of his tall, slight figure and gray head; and, briefly watching, presently he saw Sybil's shadow on the curtain of one of the end rooms.

"She has called to see the father—not the son!" he muttered, perplexed for the moment.

Then, like a blinding flash, there recurred to his mind the interview he had overheard in the Barnard parlors.

"It was to Philip Slocum the girl referred!" he decided, thrilled through every nerve by the import of the discovery. "And that explains George Slocum's agitation! By Heaven, I must overhear this interview!"

It was dark outside. Only the faint glow from the curtained window broke the gloom of the scene. Moving quickly, Keene silently approached the room.

The window was down at the bottom, but the upper half had been slightly lowered for ventilation.

Whipping out his knife, the detective cautiously inserted the blade under the lower sash, and by a hair's breadth at a time silently raised it till he could hear the voices from within."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCENE WITHIN.

The man whom Sybil Howard confronted in the privacy of his own library was about fifty years of age, and in appearance a typical American gentleman.

Nor did appearances much belie him. Philip Slocum had inherited his father's great fortune some twenty years before, and could now draw his check for a million. His place on the Charles was less than a quarter mile from that of his late legal adviser, Joseph Barnard, who had been the attorney of his father before him.

He looked all that he was. His hands were fair and delicate, and he was very scrupulously dressed. His countenance was pale and grave, with an expression of indefinable sadness, as if something in the past had left a shadow on the man.

He had taken one of his luxurious easy-chairs, and sat with his gaze fixed upon the pale face of his visitor, who, as if scarce able to contain herself, stood with one arm resting on the broad marble mantel, her garment thrown back from her shapely shoulders, and her magnificent features set in an expression of icy determination.

"I cannot conceive, Sybil, why you should have written me as you did," the banker said doubtfully, in rather tremulous tones.

"I shall presently tell you why," Sybil answered, with a firmness born of desperate resolution. "You have made sure that we are alone and unheard?"

"Perfectly so! That was your instruction."

"I demand it for your sake, less than for my own. I first am going to tell you, Mr. Slocum, why I am here."

"Do so, please!"

"It is because I want your influence to accomplish a certain object; your aid, that I may realize a hope so dear to my heart that I would sacrifice all but life to attain it. If I can secure your influence willingly it may save further discussion between us," she concluded curtly.

"What is this hope?"

"That of becoming the wife of your son, George Slocum, sir!"

The face of the banker changed slightly, becoming a trifle more pale, but he responded quietly:

"I think I have heard your late uncle say something of this. In fact, he has tried to prevail upon me to urge George into a marriage with you. I can guess why your heart is so set upon it!"

A covert sneer in the man's tone sent a momentary flush like that of shameful agony to the girl's white face, as if his doubt of the genuineness of her love was a wrong greater than she could bear.

"It is not with any mercenary motive, Mr. Philip Slocum!" she replied, with passionate fervor, her splendid eyes aglow. "No, sir, never that! never that! It is alone because I love him, more dearly than life; so dearly even that I sacrifice that womanly reserve which should have kept me from such a step as this! I have grown up with him, sir, and I know him for what he is—all that is manly and noble and grand. If he stood in the street a pauper, I would marry him for love alone! Have you never heard that a woman can love so madly that at whatever cost she will not suffer the perverting of her hope?"

"I now can imagine such a case!" said the banker dryly. "And what leads you to appeal to me at just this time?"

"Because, sir, at just this time it is rumored that George thinks of marrying another."

"And you wish me to interpose in your behalf?" frowned the banker.

"Yes!"

"In a word, you wish me to attempt coercion, if necessary?"

"If necessary—yes!"

"And if I refuse even to consider such a proposition?"

"You will not refuse!"

"But I do—positively!"

"You will reconsider it!"

"I shall not!"

"Is that final?"

"It is final!"

The girl, in whose cheeks not a vestige of color was remaining, drew a deep breath and dropped the dark wrap she wore entirely from her shoulders.

"Then you drive me to a worse side of this discussion," she said curtly, with a nervous twitching of her gray lips. "I have not come here to ask this as a favor only!'

The banker half started from his chair.

"For what, then?" he demanded hoarsely, with a betrayal of rising apprehension. "What do you mean, Sybil Howard? Do you dare threaten me?"

"My love dares anything!" cried Sybil with a sort of solemn fervor. "Are you prepared, Mr. Slocum, to quietly hear what I have to say?"

That she held some power over this man by which she awed and subdued him, or, at least, that he believed her possessed of such a power, there could be no doubt. For he sat trembling in every fiber of his slight figure, his eyes at times shrinking from those of Sybil, and with his pallid features drawn as if by the very agony of secret dread and doubt.

"I will hear you—yes!" he faltered huskily. "But I——"

"Sir, there will be no buts, after you have heard!"

She came nearer to him now, with an ominous drooping of her arching brows, and said slowly, with impressive significance:

"So far as the world knows, Mr. Slocum, you and my late uncle were very good friends—weren't you?"

"So far as the world knows—yes!" bitterly answered the banker, with a visible shudder.

"Oh, but he was a friend to you, despite that you intimate the contrary!" the girl cried pointedly, with an upward toss of her shapely head.

"He was that when your father died, sir!" she went on. "He held the will executed by your father, by which you, sir, were disinherited if you married the girl who is now your wife. Did he expose that you were already married to her, and that your protest to the contrary, made at your father's deathbed, was a perjury? Oh, no; not he! Nor after his death did he produce the will which would have sent you head over heels by the board, and have bequeathed to charity all of your father's fortune."

Philip Slocum sat wringing his bloodless hands, but did not answer.

"No, he did nothing of the kind, Mr. Slocum!" Sybil Howard steadily continued. "Instead, my late uncle stood by you like a brother! He let it appear that your father had died intestate. He had himself appointed administrator of the estate. And he threw the entire property into the hands of your father's only child—into your hands, Mr. Philip Slocum, like the stanch friend he truly was! Were he to have produced that will, even at this late date, sir, it would have made you—a pauper!"

On the banker's ghastly face there had settled a frown of intense and virulent bitterness.

"Your knave of an uncle has been well repaid through all these past years!" he replied, in tones he scarce could govern. "He has made me a puppet under his evil thumb! I have yielded to his every demand. I have made him rich, as he claimed to have made me!"

"And did he not?"

"No! no, eternally no!" cried Slocum, with passionate fervency. "For God in heaven knows that the will itself was an outrage, the impulsive deed of a father blinded by his own false pride and passions! And your designing uncle, with a view to his own knavish welfare, upheld my father in this injustice, only to prove traitor to it after my father's death. In the sight of God, my father's fortune rightfully belonged to me, though I married whom I would! As for you, Sybil Howard, you have been playing the spy!"

The girl did not resent his suppressed anger. There was something pathetic even in her inflexible firmness. She fell back a step, to stand with her jeweled hand resting on the table, and her superb figure erect and rigid.

"Not precisely a spy!" she retorted proudly. "But I did hear by accident your interview with my uncle the night before he was murdered. It was then only that I discovered the secret which so long has bound you two."

"Did you hear all?"

"Enough to serve my present purpose, sir!" she said firmly. "My uncle demanded the same favor I have asked. You refused. He insisted. He threatened to produce the will unless you complied. You begged for one day in which to consider, and you required that the will should be brought from the city, that you again might see it. He assented to these provisions, and you were to call again the following night—that on which he was murdered! He little dreamed the desperate and appalling purpose you carried in mind!"

Like a man struck a sudden blow, the banker sprang from his seat.

"Merciful God!" he cried, aghast. "You don't imply that I killed Joseph Barnard!"

The girl stood as motionless and white as a figure of marble.

"Were you not with him on the night of the crime?"

"Yes, I was! But I——"

"Wait! There is no need to prolong this painful scene! You alone were with my uncle that evening. I saw you at eleven o'clock, when you left the house. I was near the edge of the park, and saw you rush homeward by the way of the woods. Why did you not go by the street? Did you fear observation? Why have you not come forward and admitted yourself to be the man who visited my uncle that night? Shall I tell you why? Shall——"

"Sybil!"

"There is no need! The evidence speaks for itself! Your own face condemns you!" she interrupted sternly, and stooping, she caught up her garment from the floor.

"You're in the wrong! You——"

With a gesture she checked him, as she swung round from the door to which she had turned.

"I am not in the wrong!" she cried forcibly, with eyes glowing with the fire of a triumph she made no effort to conceal. "If I am wrong—I leave you to make public the incriminating facts you have concealed, even while you have known the officers of the law to be seeking for the visitor of that fatal night!"

Shaken from head to foot, the banker covered his ghastly face with his hands, as if the situation in which he was involved was too terrible for contemplation even.

The girl stood for a moment longer.

"You will reconsider the favor I have asked!" she concluded pointedly. "You will do it for me as you did it for my uncle! For the power that was his now is mine! And a greater power, even—since life itself is now in the balance!"

"Oh, my God!"

"I shall await your answer over to-morrow! And now I bid you good night, sir!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE ENGINEER'S REVENGE.

By C. M. FRANK.

Several years ago, before legislation interfered and passed reform laws in regard to steam craft, there was a set of reckless officers and captains who paid no regard to human life at all. There existed an insane rivalry between them as to who should have the fastest boat. The consequence of this rivalship was fearful, and is written on the pages of the past in indelible characters.

Among the engineers who were acknowledged to be the fastest on the Western waters, was one James Dalton. This man had been the hero of several explosions, but, strange to say, had invariably escaped uninjured, and had gained the title of the "Steam Fiend" among the boatmen. Captains eager to gain for their boats a reputation for speed, would employ this man in preference to a more prudent one.

It was a beautiful evening in spring that the *Lucy Belmont* lay at the landing of St. Louis. A gay party was gathering on her decks and in her saloons, and joyous parties of youths and maidens were still crowding on board.

The cause of this merry gathering is briefly told. George Brandon, the young and popular clerk of the *Belmont*, has this day been united to the belle of St. Louis, and their numerous friends are accompanying them on an excursion in honor of the happy event.

The *Lucy Belmont* was one of the crack boats of the time, and was considered one of the swiftest on the Mississippi. James Dalton was her chief engineer, and she had done her best running under his charge. Dalton was a young man, handsome and rather prepossessing in appearance. He had been an aspirant for the hand of the lady whom young Brandon had wed, and with some show of success it was said until, in his mad desire to pass a rival boat, he blew the one he was on up. The fact coming to the young lady's ears, she informed him, in plain terms, that she could not consent to unite her destiny with one who held the lives of his fellow beings at so low a value and would sacrifice them on the altar of a petty ambition.

The noble boat was hissing, groaning, and swaying under a load of steam and human beings. James Dalton stood grim and silent at his post, ready to obey the signal to back out. The bell rings and she moves out into the middle of the stream. The band strikes up a merry air, the banners unfold themselves to the breeze, and the steamer glides swiftly up the stream 'mid cheers and joyous exclamations.

Soon the last view of the city disappears, and night spreads her dark mantle over wood and wave, and diamonds and jewels flash in the brilliantly lighted saloons of the *Lucy Belmont*.

On sped the boat. James Dalton went about his duties with apparent calmness, but when the gay notes of the music, or a merry laugh was borne to his ears, a close observer might have seen a strange light in his eye.

On sped the boat. Point after point was passed; she seemed to be fairly flying. Her prow dashed up the silvery spray, which in the bright moonbeams formed countless gems.

James Dalton was among his firemen, encouraging them on in their labors, and even occasionally assisting them. All the weights were on the safety-valve cord, so as to confine all the steam.

On, on flew the boat; on went the dance.

It was near the hour of midnight that George Brandon had occasion to go down on the lower deck. His experienced eye and ear told him that danger was near at hand. Hastening to Dalton, he exclaimed:

"Let off the steam, or she will explode!"

"Go up and enjoy yourself, and I will attend to my business," was Dalton's answer.

Brandon sprang, knife in hand, for the valve rope, but he was confronted by Dalton, a drawn revolver in his hand, and his eyes gleaming like coals of fire.

"Go," said he, in a tone of thrilling distinctness, "or by the Great Eternal I'll send you to the other world. Go kiss your bride before you go; you have no time to lose. In my heart I vowed that your triumph should not be of long duration."

Brandon did not wait to hear more, but rushed up to inform them above of their danger.

Dalton rushed forward among the firemen, crying: "Fire, fire, you black demons!" and at the same time passing more spirits among them. Thus incited, the firemen stirred up the red-hot furnaces, and shoved in more fuel, and as they worked there the fire from the glowing furnaces lighted up their dark faces, now rendered demoniac by the potations, they looking, indeed, like the fiends of darkness.

There were shrieks, and cries, and wild confusion among that gay throng when George Brandon shouted to them to hurry to the after end of the boat.

Scarcely had he done so, when there came a deafening crash, a sullen roar, and a violent concussion.

Silence reigned for a moment, and then arose the wild cries and groans of the wounded and dying, and the *Lucy Belmont* lay a confused, burning, sinking wreck.

Such was James Dalton's revenge; and a more diabolical one was never devised by mortal man.

Shortly after this affair James Dalton was ruled off the river, and when last heard of was in the wilds of California.

THE HUMMING OF THE WIRES.

You have all heard the humming and singing of telegraph and telephone wires. No doubt you have concluded that it is caused by the action of the wind on the wires, and given it no further thought. But it is not true that the singing is caused by the wind, and if you are at all observing you will notice that often the humming sound is to be heard in cold winter mornings, when the smoke from chimneys goes straight up until it is lost in the clouds.

The wind has nothing to do with the sound, and according to an Austrian scientist the vibrations are due to the changes of atmospheric temperature, and especially through the action of cold, as a lowering of temperature induces a shortening of the wires extending over the whole of the conductor. A considerable amount of friction is produced on the supporting bell, thus inducing sounds both in the wires and the poles. When this humming has been going on, birds have mistaken the sound for insects inside the poles, and have been seen to peck with their bills on the outside as they do upon apple and other trees. A story is told of a bear that mistook the humming noise as coming from a nest of bees, and clawed at the pole and tore away the stones at its base in the hope of finding the much-coveted honey.

HIS PRAYER ANSWERED.

A little Philadelphia boy had committed some misdemeanor, for which he was about to receive punishment at the hands of his mother. The boy begged to be first allowed to go to his room. Permission was granted, and the child went upstairs to his own room and closed the door behind him. The mother followed and listened outside, after telling him he must hurry down again to receive punishment. The boy went to the side of the bed, knelt down, and this was his prayer:

"Dear Lord, if you love little boys, and want to help this one out, now is your time."

The prayer was answered.

A TRAVELING MOUNTAIN.

A traveling mountain is found at the Cascades of the Columbia. It is a triple-peaked mass of dark-brown basalt, six or eight miles in length, where it fronts the river, and rises to a height of almost two thousand feet above the water. That it is in motion is the last thought which would be likely to suggest itself to the mind of any one passing it; yet it is a well-established fact that this entire mountain is moving slowly but steadily down the river.

AUTOMATIC INSTRUMENTS OF DEATH.

The following method of automatic execution, which has within the last few years been successfully operated in Leipzig, is perhaps the most novel invented. The Leipzig instrument consists of a raised platform about twenty feet square, and having a comfortable easy-chair in the center of it, while behind the chair is a statue of justice holding a balance in the left hand. A powerful electric battery is installed under the platform and communicates with the chair. The victim is made to sit on the chair, to which he can be bound if necessary, and the sentence of the court is read to him by the proper authority; the executioner breaks the wand which he carries in his hand as the symbol of his office, and throws the pieces into one of the scales of the balance, which makes a contact, and so sets the machine in motion. The result is a painless and instantaneous death. In the old days of torture there were several instruments of death which were horrible in their fiendish cruelty. One was called the "Brazen Image," the figure holding in the hand an apple of pure gold, which, on being touched, riddled the body of the venturesome one with poisoned arrows. The other was a figure of the Virgin, so arranged that on any one being placed before it the victim was clutched and thrust inside the figure to be pierced by knives and killed.

THE NEWS OF ALL NATIONS.

Legless, Deaf, and Dumb Man Earns Big Wages.

With both legs cut off above the knees and deaf and dumb, William A. Boular, better known as "Deafy," of Atchison, Kan, makes a larger salary than thousands who possess all their faculties and limbs. Boular is a bricklayer. When employed at laying bricks for street paving, contractors pay him twice the wages they do his fellow workmen, because they claim he lays twice as many bricks. Boular says, with his fingers, of course, the secret of it is that he doesn't have to stoop.

He lives in a suburb of Atchison, and, as his work often takes him several miles from home, he keeps a horse. He can hitch up a horse as fast as any one, and climbs into the cart unassisted.

Years ago, Boular had his legs cut off by a railroad engine, owing to the fact that he was deaf and did not hear the warning signal. Since that time he has never been the object of charity, preferring to work for a living. He owns his home, and has a wife, also deaf and dumb, and family. For paving streets Boular receives from $5 to $6 per day.

Shin Bone in His Spine.

John P. Swift, of Watertown, Mass., an athlete, who was admitted to the Massachusetts General Hospital helpless and supposedly dying from spinal tuberculosis, has walked forth from that institution with his spinal column straightened and mended by one of the most remarkable feats of bone surgery ever performed in Boston.

A piece of his shin bone was inserted in the spinal column to replace one of the lumbar vertebræ which had been eaten away by the disease. The operation was performed by Doctor Elliott G. Brockett, a member of the hospital staff and associate professor of orthopedic surgery in Harvard medical school, and Doctor J. L. Drummey, of Watertown, a member of the Newton Hospital staff.

Swift says that his spine seemed as good as ever, except that it was stiff where the new piece had been inserted. He said he felt perfectly strong and normal. He added that the doctors had told him that if he did not bend his back suddenly or attempt to carry heavy weights his spine would be as good as ever.

Mexican Escapes With Vest of Gold.

Leon Vigio, a Mexican jeweler and refugee, stepped off the steamer *Monterey*, in from Vera Cruz, and, throwing open his coat, showed the customs men a waistcoat made of gold. He had $50,000 American money in Mexican pesos sewed into the vest. It weighed 100 pounds, but Vigio preferred to carry it that way. He will bank it in New York.

Cat Survives Eight-inch Pin.

After having swallowed an eight-inch hatpin, a three-months-old kitten belonging to Elsie Kinney, of Watertown, N. Y., has been relieved of her troubles.

The pin was swallowed head foremost, the head entering the stomach. The sharp end could be felt under the jaw. Doctor Thomas Burns, a veterinarian, cut a small hole in the cat's throat, worked the pin out as far as the head, swung it around, and, by bending it slightly, pushed it out headfirst from the cat's mouth.

$500,000 for its Employees.

Directors of the National Carbon Company mailed letters to the stockholders recently asking approval of a plan for sharing profits with the employees. Stockholders are asked to set aside $500,000 of a new issue of stock to be given to employees on terms to be announced at a public meeting on February 16.

The company employs 4,000 persons, and has nine branch factories in other parts of the country.

Missouri Mules Scarce.

It has been a great many years since mules have been as scarce in the mule-raising section of Missouri, and in consequence those mule men who have held their summer purchases until late in the winter have realized large profits on their investments.

One dealer who bought a bunch of mules during the summer at an average of $130 a head has already been offered $185 apiece for them, almost clear profit of $55 each.

Wrecked on Desert Island.

A thrilling tale of the seas was told by two American seamen from the Glasgow owned steamer, *Mary Ellen*, on their arrival in Calcutta.

They state that the steamer while on the way from Glasgow to the Philippines was wrecked on an island off Dutch Borneo several months ago. They spent twenty days on the desert island with only oysters for food, and suffering from fever. Eventually they met a party of Malays, who took them to Tarakana. They stayed there six months, and then went to Singapore. They will be sent back to America. They are the only survivors of the wreck.

Diver Loses Clothing by Suction of Water.

E. E. Dawson, expert diver, narrowly escaped death at Memphis, Tenn., when he was held prisoner by suction in thirty feet of water in one of the city's wells, and was unable to communicate his predicament to the helpers on the surface.

"I was working in about five fathoms of water," says Dawson, in explaining the experience, "and was trying to put in a new section of casing. The well is not far from the pumping station, and there is a strong current rushing through the mains there. While I was at work, the leg of my overalls was sucked into the opening, and the current was so strong that it was clamped down as tight as if in a vise. As soon as I discovered that I was foul I made an attempt to pull away, but pull as I might I could not start the overalls, and every time I let go the water sucked a little more of the cloth into the opening.

"If I had had a knife it would have been a simple thing to cut the cloth and liberate myself, but I left my knife on the topside when I went down. I put the handle of my hammer behind the overalls and tried to pry them loose, but there was nothing doing. I will pay the tribute to the overalls that they were well made, because it took me some time before I could find a seam that I could tear.

"Finally I ripped the seam open, and, after taking off the heavy lead shoe, I liberated myself, and the overalls were whipped out of my hands and sucked into the mains. They found them next day in one of the pumps."

Elephant is Too Loving.

"Pet," the lady elephant of the zoo at Los Angeles, Cal., is compelled to do without the services of her trainer. In a sudden rush of affection recently she strained Trainer Delmore to her breast with her trunk, and broke three of his ribs.

Uncle Sam's 8,000 Islands.

An interesting story of the development of Uncle Sam's islands is told in a report just issued by the National Geographical Society. The report sets forth many interesting facts.

The National Geographical Society's report shows that the United States has 8,000 islands, supporting a population of 10,000,000, or more people than were in the entire nation a century ago. The commerce of the islands exceeds $300,000,000, being more than that of the United States in any year prior to 1850. American capital invested in them aggregates approximately $400,000,000; they ship to the United States $100,000,000 of their products every year, and take in exchange products of about equal value.

A feature of the report is the development of Porto Rico, Hawaii, and the Alaskan islands. It shows that when Porto Rico came under American possession fifteen years ago there was only one building in the island erected for school purposes, while to-day there are 1,200 such buildings. There were 25,000 pupils enrolled in the public schools in the first year of American administration; now there are 175,000. Then there was only one good road of forty miles; now there are about 1,000 miles of good roads. Production of sugar has grown from 65,000 tons a year to 365,000. The foreign commerce was about $20,000,000 a year; now it is nearly $100,000,000. Then the island bought about $2,500,000 worth of American products a year; now it buys nearly $40,000,000.

The Hawaiian Islands have been extremely prosperous since they came permanently under the American flag in 1900. The assessed value of property increased one-half, the value of the sugar crop more than doubled, deposits in banks trebled, and those in savings banks quadrupled. Hawaii's irrigation system is the marvel of the engineering world, and the quantity of sugar produced per acre far exceeds that of any other spot on the globe.

Seven Slain in Battle in Oklahoma's Prison.

Seven men are dead and one woman and two men injured as a result of an attempt on the part of three prisoners to escape from the State penitentiary at McAlester, Okla.

Four men, one of them John B. Thomas, a former United States district judge and congressman from Illinois, were killed within the prison walls by the convicts. The slayers themselves were shot to death outside the prison, while fleeing in the warden's buggy.

Despite the excitement caused by the three men in trying to shoot down every one who came in their way, no general attempt was made by other convicts to join in the delivery. China Reed, Tom Lane, and Charles Koontz, the mutineers, worked in the tailor shop, and when their day's work was ended they approached the back door of the office in the administration building. There they met John Martin, the turnkey, and told him they wanted to see the parole officer. As Martin opened the door, Reed struck him repeatedly with a large revolver, shot him through the cheek, and seized the keys.

The three prisoners, all armed with revolvers and shouting to others to follow them, ran toward the warden's office. There they met Patrick Oates, the assistant warden. Before Oates could defend himself Reed shot him through the heart. A random shot passing through a door in the office of H. H. Drover, the Bertillon officer, killed him. He was rushing to aid his fellow officers when he fell. F. C. Godfrey, a guard, sprang directly into the path of the mutineers, discharging his revolver at them. He, too, fell a victim to Reed's deadly aim.

John R. Thomas was sitting in the warden's office awaiting the return of R. W. Dick, the warden, with whom he had a business engagement.

"There must be some trouble outside," he said, as he rose and walked toward the door of the office. Apparently mistaking Thomas for the warden, the mutineers fired a volley at him. He sank to the floor mortally wounded. Fearing an alarm might be given by the telephone operator, Miss Foster, the three men next gave their attention to the switchboard. They tried to disconnect it.

"You come with us," they shouted, as they dragged the girl into the prison yard, holding her before them to keep the guards from shooting.

Shielded by the girl and cheered on by 1,300 convicts the three men made their way across the prison yard. Only one shot was fired at them, and it struck the girl.

As Miss Foster sank to the ground, wounded, the convicts sprang to the prison gate. With the keys they had taken from Martin they unlocked it and were free. Outside the gate the horse of Dick, the warden, was hitched. The three men sprang into the buggy.

Guards and prison officials quickly mounted horses and started in pursuit of the fleeing convicts. Soon they were near enough to pour a merciless fire into the buggy. This the fugitives returned. Then the convicts' horse fell with a bullet through its body, and the fire from the buggy ceased. When the pursuers reached the place the three men lay dead, riddled with bullets.

"English" Language in Siam.

The proprietors of a newspaper in Siam have distributed the following notice: "The news of English we tell the latest. Writ in perfect style and most earliest. Do a murder commit, we hear of and tell it. Do a mighty chief die, we publish it, and in borders of somber. Staff and each one been college, and write like the Kipling and the Dickens. We circle every town and extortionate not for advertisements. Buy it. Buy it."

Chooses His Own Monument.

"Uncle Joe" Cannon, former speaker of the House of Representatives, declared that he would prefer to select his own monument rather than leave the choice to relatives after he was gone.

The monument he chose has been placed in position at Danville, Ill. It is of massive dark Barre granite, all highly polished, and weighs 56 tons. The die, which contains the family name, alone weighs 26 tons. The monument is fifteen feet high.

Mule Feeds its Teammate.

George Rassi, a Milford drayman, owns a mule which has learned to slip his halter, go to the feed bin, fill himself with corn, and then to carry corn to another mule in the stable. He has done this several times, and on one occasion made fourteen trips to the bin and carried as many ears of corn to his teammate.

Sheep Glands Repair Brain.

Philip Tague, 15 years old, who was brought to a New Orleans hospital three months ago without the power of reason or of speech, has been cured. When the boy came to New Orleans it was found that the thyroid gland in his throat was unable to furnish vital internal secretions necessary for the development of the brain and the body. He was fed upon glands taken from freshly slaughtered sheep, which caused the gland in his throat to grow, and to-day he is possessed of all the human faculties.

Eye Knocked Out by Bullet, Falls in Hand.

While Donald Wagner, 45 years old, an engineer on the Pennsylvania Railroad, was running a shifting engine at Hermine, Greensburg, Pa., he was struck in the eye by a ball from an air gun in the hands of some boys playing near the track. When Wagner put his hand to his face the eye dropped into his hand.

China Nest Egg Kills Snake.

The pine snake, the variety that roams the pine belt of New Jersey, is noted for its depredations on poultry yards, but one which escaped from the Bronx Zoo and visited the zoo's henhouse has paid the penalty of a marauder.

When the snake was returned to his cage, it was noticed that he had a large lump in his interior which refused to reduce. Finally the reptile pined away and died. The circumstance aroused the curiosity of Raymond Ditmars, the curator, who had a post-mortem operation performed. The cause of death was found to be a china nest egg which the foolish snake had swallowed. The egg had never fooled a hen, and it was considered surprising that a snake "fell" for it.

Find New Fish in Montana.

A variety of whitefish, strange to Montana waters, has been discovered in Echo Lake, southeast of Kalispell according to the State fish and game commission. It is a Williamson whitefish always found heretofore in mountain streams. The fish found in Echo Lake are much larger than those caught in streams, probably due to the fact that those in the still waters do not have to battle the swift currents.

Snake Bites Are No Worry to Him.

Peter Gruber, of Rochester, N. Y., known as "Rattlesnake Pete," has just been bitten by one of the poisonous reptiles for the twenty-eighth time, and is still alive.

For years Gruber's hobby has been snakes, and he always has several rattlers in a cage in the window of his restaurant. It was while cleaning one of the cages that he received his latest bite. Gruber had taken the usual precaution of placing a screen over the reptiles, but the biggest of the "diamond-back" bunch worked his head above it, and was not noticed until it was too late.

The snake sank its fangs in the right thumb, and when he withdrew them a part of the flesh was carried away, too. Gruber went through his usual routine of gashing the flesh around the wound with his pocket knife, and, as soon as possible, killed one of the snakes and applied the warm flesh together with some magnesium on the wound. This he has found from experience is the best remedy for the poisonous bite.

When Gruber was bitten for the twenty-seventh time, about four years ago, the snake's fang struck an artery and the man almost died. He was in the hospital several weeks before his recovery was certain.

He owns a coat made entirely of rattlesnake skins. It is of a modern pattern.

Cannot Escape Prison Term.

John Williams, superintendent of the estate of Edwin Hawley, on Long Island, New York, is between two fires. The court recently ordered him to kill a buck deer, which killed its keeper. If he carries out the order he will violate the State game law, and will be liable to arrest and a heavy fine. He is undecided whether to defy the law and stand trial for it or to defy the court order and be arrested for contempt.

Wins a Farm by Shooting a Fox.

Isaac Kalma, of L'Anse, Mich., made the greatest killing of his life when he shot a black fox. The value of the skin ranges from $800 to $1,000. Kalma already has selected the forty acres on which he will make his home as an owner and not as a tenant.

Aviator Drowns After Fall.

Arthur E. Perry, an aëronaut, said to have formerly been a member of the army aviation corps, was drowned at Tampa, Fla., when his parachute landed in the Hillsborough River. Perry jumped from a balloon when at a height of about 1,000 feet. It is believed he became entangled in the ropes, and drowned.

Gives Blood for an Office.

Monroe G. Ogden, an attorney, of Macon, Ga., who was appointed income-tax inspector for Georgia, owes his new office to the fact that he gave two quarts of his blood in an effort to save the life of Mrs. J. L. Curry, daughter of Senator Bacon. The blood transfusion, however, proved futile.

Railroad Strike is Won in a Day.

A strike on the Delaware & Hudson Railroad, which tied up the entire system, was settled the same day it started. Railroad officials met the union's demands that they restore two discharged employees, James A. Lynch, an engineer, and F. A. Slade, a conductor, to their former positions. Five thousand men were involved in the walkout.

Slade and Lynch were discharged more than a year ago when a car on their train jumped the track and bumped along the ties for three and a half miles. The men were discharged on the ground that they were negligent, and had violated a company rule and caused much damage to property. The union officials replied that the accident was unavoidable, and that no serious damage was done. For several months the company and union officials debated the proposition of restoring the men to their places; then 98 per cent of the employees voted to strike if Slade and Lynch were not reinstated.

Dreams of Fortune; Gets It.

The next day after he dreamed he had been left a fortune, L. L. van Morse, a Freeport, L. I., painter, was notified he was one of seven heirs to an estate of an uncle worth approximately $500,000.

Serum Doubles Milk Yield.

Experiments made on goats in the College of Medicine, at Cornell University, may eventually lead to an increase in the supply of milk from cows. According to R. P. Hill, a graduate student at Cornell, working under Professor Sutherland Simpson, a goat has been made to give milk of twice the quantity and five times the cream content regarded as normal, through the injection of a recently discovered serum under the skin or into a large blood vessel of the animal.

Whether the same process will give equally gratifying results when applied to cows has yet to be determined, but the investigators think that there is hope.

The serum used is a preparation made from the pituitary gland of live stock. It has been found that injections have to be made frequently in order to keep up the increased production. It is but a short time after the injection that the increase is noted.

Is "Chief Sam" Honest?

Inquiries made by Charles D. Clem, a negro, of Chanute, Kan., and by several others, have caused many persons to doubt the reliability of "Chief Alfred Sam," who has been promoting an emigration scheme among the negroes of Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas. He proposed to take all who wished to return to their native country, to Africa, for the sum of $25, and to give each person sixty-four acres of land.

A letter from Duse Mohamed, editor of the *African Times and Orient Review,* of London, one of the most influential negroes of England, stating that he had never heard of Chief Alfred Sam or his project, caused the circulation of the rumor that the promoter was not sincere.

Rockets Save Crew When Hope is Gone.

Skyrockets shot from the deck of the five-masted schooner *Fuller Palmer,* saved the lives of the thirteen men aboard, for one of the signals was seen just before the vessel sank. The steamer *Marina* was the rescue ship.

The *Fuller Palmer* was caught in a severe gale which swept the Atlantic Ocean, and was so badly buffeted by the elements that it began to leak. With sails whipped into shreds by the wind, the rigging broken and coated with ice, so that it could not be handled, and the boat drifting at the mercy of the wind and waves, the crew worked nobly at the pumps to keep the schooner afloat.

Day and night they pumped trying to keep down the ever-increasing water as the pounding of the waves opened the seams and the leaks grew larger. Tons of water flooded the decks, and, turning to ice, made the vessel an unwieldy ice floe.

Finally, with all hope of making any port gone, with all the small boats and life rafts crushed by the waves, and with most of the woodwork of the decks washed away, cutting off all escape from the vessel, which they feared would sink any moment as the waves tossed it about, red lights were tied to masts where they protruded from the water, and every few moments rockets were discharged from the bridge, only to be swept away by the wind.

With all chances apparently gone, the crew huddled together in a protected corner of the deck, but the captain still maintained a watch from the bridge, and continued shooting the rockets.

Just as dawn was breaking on the fourth day a return signal was observed some miles away, and later the *Marina* appeared. As the waves had moderated somewhat, several boats were put off to the sinking ship, and all the sailors and officers were rescued. The ship was so low in the water that none of the men was able to carry away any of his belongings. The rescue was made about 154 miles southeast of Cape Cod.

Athletics Cost a Billion.

Athletic expenses of colleges in the United States amount to more than one billion dollars a year, but the major portion of the money does not go to pay for physical exercises of the students. This information was contained in the report of Doctor H. Shindle Wingert, director of physical education of Ohio State University, which was received by the athletic authorities of Indiana University recently.

The majority of students attending American colleges do not take the physical exercises necessary to keep their bodies in a healthful condition, the report says. Doctor Wingert shows that of 111,600 students in 150 institutions, only 18,359 participate in the athletic games, while in nonvarsity games 45,378 men take part. On the sports not played under the direction of colleges, only $71,000 is spent annually.

Out of 142 colleges taking part in intercollegiate sports, 37 per cent take no interest in fostering any type of physical exercise, the report says. Fifty-one per cent try to create love for sports by promoting football, baseball, basket ball, and other games. Twenty-one per cent give corrective exercises; 14 per cent hygienic lectures; 5 per cent require swimming, and 2 per cent teach dancing.

Doctor Wingert's investigation is part of the program being carried on by the college to have all students participate in some form of athletic exercise.

Flying Boat Up 3,500 Feet.

Private Francis Wildman, of the United States army aëro corps, established what is said to be a world's record for hydroaëroplanes recently, when, with a passenger, he reached an altitude of 3,500 feet in 25 minutes.

After reaching that altitude, Wildman shut off the power and glided to earth.

The weight of the machine and passengers was a ton.

Roads Alaska's Greatest Needs.

Debate in Congress on the administration's bill for the construction and operation of a government railroad in Alaska, carrying an expenditure of $35,000,000 at the outset, is nearing a close. A fleet of government-owned freight and passenger vessels, to operate from Alaska to North and South American ports, has been proposed by

Senator Norris as an amendment to the railroad bill. Ten to twenty vessels would be constructed for use as army or navy transports.

Senator Williams told the Senate that wagon roads will do more good and cost infinitely less than steam railroads in Alaska. Reports made by the government officials in charge admit that a vast sum of money has been expended on roads in the territory—nevertheless, it has no good roads.

Big Wind Blew Him Under Bed.

A pair of large shoes with legs attached protruding from under his bed were visible to William Woodley, superintendent of the apartment house at 424 Central Park West, New York, when he entered his room one night recently. Mr. Woodley softly closed and locked the door and telephoned from another room to the West One Hundredth Street police station: "Come over; I've got a burglar."

Three detectives—Boyle, Burns, and Dalton—responded. With pistols pointed they burst into Mr. Woodley's room, then stopped to look and listen. The man under the bed was snoring. It sounded like a whistle of a tugboat. The detectives seized his feet and dragged him from beneath the bed. He was a negro. He still feigned sleep, but woke up and rubbed his eyes when they shook him.

"Where am I?" said he.

"In my room, and you're a burglar," said Mr. Woodley.

"Don't say that, boss," urged the prisoner. "I don't know how I came in here. The last I knew I was walking the street, and a most awful wind blew me right through the door into this room, and as I hadn't slept for five days I just lay down, and here I am."

But as Mr. Woodley's best clothes lay on the bed all bundled and ready for carrying off, and as Mr. Woodley didn't put them there, the prisoner, who said he was John Robson, 22 years old, of Charleston, S. C., was locked up charged with burglary.

No Tango at Yale "Prom."

"There will not be a tango danced at the 'Prom,'" said Dean F. S. Jones, of the academic department at Yale, recently.

"There isn't one on the card, for I have looked it over. The boys won't dance it, anyway, I'm sure. There will be too many men of good breeding there. In fact, the whole tone of the 'Prom' is against it."

Keep Ford Wages at Home.

The Ford Motor Company, of Detroit, Mich., does not look favorably upon the foreigner who sends all his savings back to the old country, with the intention of returning there to live. Among the many questions asked by the agents who are gathering information from the employees before they are permitted to share in the $5-a-day plan is one: "What do you do with your money?"

The Ford officials say that they have been surprised at the number of those who have answered: "I send it back to the old country." Those who do so are not taken on. Old employees are not discharged, however.

"We intend to discourage this plan of sending money out of the United States as soon as possible," said Secretary Klingensmith. "We shall not discriminate between the foreigner and the American, but we shall discriminate between the foreigner who keeps his money in this country and the one who does not. Our plan is not only to keep the money in the United States, but to keep it right here in Detroit."

Two Million Autos in Use.

There are at present registered in the various countries of the world nearly 2,000,000 motor vehicles, according to statistics just compiled by the office of the secretary of state of New York. In this total the United States heads the list, having more than twice as many automobiles as Great Britain, the country which comes next. The figures, issued by Secretary Mitchell May, after a careful compilation, are as follows:

United States, 1,127,940; Great Britain, 425,838; ascertained total from various European countries 273,511; estimated total from other countries, 92,500; total, 1,919,789 registered cars.

May Yet Control Weather.

Lecturing before the Institute of Electrical Engineers, in London, Sir Oliver Lodge recently suggested the possibility of obtaining some measure of control over the weather. If clearing weather, he said, was due to electricity, it might be imagined that man could acquire some control over the electrification of the atmosphere. If it was desired to produce rain, why not send up a kite to reach the clouds? He believed that if enough electricity were discharged into the clouds the drops would behave there as they did in the laboratory; they would coalesce, and, once that had happened, the process might be repeated and cause a shower.

When rain was wanted, the lecturer said, negative electricity should be sent up, and if fine weather was wanted, positive electricity.

Gave Life to Disarm Maniac.

When the North German Lloyd steamer *Berlin* arrived in New York recently from Naples, with Antonio Cupertino, an immigrant, in irons for killing Doctor Glannoni Arrigo, the story of a tragedy on the high seas, which held the crew in a panic for half an hour, was told by Captain A. Harrasowitz.

On January 11, the day after the *Berlin* left Palermo, Doctor Arrigo, the royal Italian commissioner, examined Cupertino, who is 34 years old, and told him that he had trachoma, and would be deported when the ship reached New York. The man was accompanied by his son, Francisco, 12 years old, and appeared very excited at the thought of being sent back to Naples. That night he could not sleep, and kept the men in the single men's quarters forward awake.

At half past 5 o'clock, on the morning of January 12, about twelve hours before the *Berlin* was due at Gibraltar, Cupertino was walking the deck. The other immigrants taunted him with having trachoma, and being deported, and he worked himself into a frenzy. He shrieked in Italian that he did not care what he had or what the doctor said, he would shoot any one who attempted to prevent him landing in America.

Then he went below and got two automatic seven-chamber revolvers. With one in each hand, he met the immigrants as they came down to breakfast, and chased them on deck again. A steerage steward told an officer that Cupertino had gone mad, and the officers ordered the companion door closed. Locking him in made the

Italian worse, and he tried to squeeze through a port, but could not get his shoulders through.

Meantime Captain Harrasowitz had been informed that a madman had jumped overboard, and in his hurry to reach the forward deck he fell down the ladder and injured his right knee. The chief officer ordered the watch to rig two fire hose.

The door of the companion was opened, and, as Cupertino sprang forward, he was hit full by the two streams of water and washed into a corner on the port side in the bow of the ship. Then he leaped up and down like a rat in a trap, shrieking that they were trying to kill him.

Doctor Arrigo had been summoned by the captain. He was a naval officer, and he said he would soon disarm the man. He began to crawl toward him on hands and knees under the protection of the fire hose. Cupertino pointed a revolver at him and fired seven shots, killing him instantly.

A moment later the water knocked Cupertino off his feet, and the crew rushed in and grabbed him before he had time to fire his second revolver. He was put in irons in the ship's prison, and the body of the royal commissioner was sent ashore.

When the *Berlin* docked, Cupertino and his son were taken in a special tugboat to Ellis Island. There the doctors, after a thorough examination, said he was not suffering from trachoma, and was not crazy. Before a board of special inquiry, Cupertino admitted that he had killed a lad in Naples when he was twenty, and had been three years and six months in prison for the crime. He carried revolvers, he said, because he was afraid of being robbed in America. He had about 1,300 lire in his pockets.

The board ordered him to be excluded, and he was taken back in irons to the *Berlin* and locked up. His son will go back with him.

To Return Davis Relics.

Jefferson Davis' two dueling pistols, a double-barreled pistol, and appurtenances, seized by Union troops near the close of the Civil War, and which have been in the custody of the war department nearly fifty years, will be turned over to Joseph A. Hayes, of Colorado, whose wife is the eldest daughter of the former president of the Confederacy. The shawl and raglan belonging to Mrs. Davis, said to have been worn by Davis when he was captured, were not included among the articles for which Mr. Hayes asked, but they will be returned if the Davis heirs ask for them.

Secretary Garrison decided to return the relics on an opinion by Attorney General McReynolds that Davis never had been legally deprived of his ownership of the property.

Animal Values Break Record.

Live stock on farms increased $443,758,000 in value in the last twelve months, according to the annual live-stock report of the Orange Judd *Farmer,* made public recently. The report shows that farm wealth in this form of property breaks all records.

The total value of all classes of farm animals reached $5,596,024,000. Of this total, horses furnished $2,185,555,000; mules, $520,330,000; milch cows, $1,032,960,000.

The number of meat-producing animals, however, has decreased, beef cattle showing a falling off in numbers of 1,762,000 head, or 5 per cent; hogs a decrease of 4,082,000, or 7 per cent. Horses increase slightly in number. Meat-producing animals increase in average value per head, milch cows having advanced 21 per cent; other cattle, 18 per cent; hogs, 17 per cent, and sheep, 8 per cent during the year. The decrease in hogs is the result of heavy cholera losses.

Phipps' Millions for Radium Cure.

Henry Phipps, of Pittsburgh, is understood to be contemplating the erection of twenty hospitals throughout the country for the treatment of cancer with radium, and to stand ready to furnish the $15,000,000 which it is estimated the buildings, grounds, and radium will cost.

While Mr. Phipps' name was not mentioned, the statement that a multimillionaire friend of his had this philanthropic object in mind was made recently to the House committee on mines and mining by Joseph M. Flannery, president of the Standard Chemical Company, of Pittsburgh, said to be the biggest producer of radium in the world.

Taft Dead Image of Himself.

Ex-President Taft, who spoke in Philadelphia recently, told the following story on himself:

The ex-president went into a drug store at the Pennsylvania Station to buy a shaving stick. The clerk who sold him the stick looked him over carefully.

"Why, you are the dead image of Taft," the clerk exclaimed.

"I told him," said the ex-president, in relating the story, "that he ought to be careful of his emphasis on the word 'dead.'"

Says Sweden Fears War.

The *Aftonbladet,* commenting on the speech from the throne of King Gustav, of Sweden, recently, in which the monarch told of plans to increase Swedish armaments, expresses the opinion that the reason for the increase is the fear of war with Russia. It says Russia is actually preparing for war.

The alleged Russian military measures being taken in Finland have frightened the Swedish press, which has been making an anti-Russian campaign for some time.

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